IS IT RIGHTEOUS TO READ?
TOWARDS THE VIOLENCE OF REVELATION AND AN ETHICS OF READING VIOLENCE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

2019

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To Mom and Dad,
”אהבה מקלקלת את השורה“)בראשית רבה, וירא, פרשה נה, סימן ח(.

Is it righteous to be?
— Emmanuel Lévinas

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PREFACE

Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, David and Goliath—these narratives constitute only several of many violent biblical texts with which many children get acquainted at an early age. I, too, have known that the Bible contains violence since my early childhood, but I could neither articulate that fact nor understand its implications until I reached twelve years of age. In 2003, my congregational rabbi, Rabbi Stanley Miles, explained that I would select which part of פרשת וישלח that I would read for my bar mitzvah. Familiarity greeted me as I began to read through the appropriate chapters and verses, for I knew the story of Jacob's struggle. The colorful tale very much appealed to my sense of wonder, fancy, and delight. Almost instantaneously, that lightness of feeling turned heavy and dark like the words before me: "[1]Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. [2]Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her and lay with her by force. …" (Gen. 34:1-2). That story not only shocked and angered me but also, perhaps most stressful of all, confounded me. I understood the account perfectly, but I could not and still cannot wrap my head around its horrific violence—the rape of Dinah, the slaughter of every male Shechemite, still smarting from circumcision, and the capture of innocent women and children. Infuriated and puzzled, I decided to read the Rape of Dinah for my bar mitzvah.[1] That tale continues to haunt me to this day.

An ethics of reading violence in the Hebrew Bible interests me because violence disturbs me, for it makes a mockery of my conviction that the meaning of life is to relieve the pain of the Other. Violence does not merely impugn whether life has meaning; it performatively eviscerates meaning from life. Violence exsanguinates life itself. This thesis constitutes my attempt at

[1] Rabbi Miles has told me that, in his fifty years in the rabbinate, no one else whom he prepared to become a bar/bat mitzvah chose to read this grisly tale.

recovering the ethical structure that I, following Emmanuel Lévinas believe undergirds all of life. I hope that those who read it feel called to respond to the face of the Other and find meaning as well.

I would like to thank Dr. David H. Aaron for serving as my thesis adviser. These past four years in Cincinnati, I have had the great the privilege of studying the Pentateuch, prophetic literature, Midrash, intertextuality, translation theory, and more with this tremendous scholar. His intellect, wisdom, and sharp wit continue to awe and inspire me. He has transformed how I approach biblical and rabbinic literature, challenged me to think critically, and to reexamine my own ways of being in the world. If from Lévinas I have learned the importance of action, of alleviating the pain of the Other, then Aaron has taught me the equally important lesson, per Theodor Adorno, not to cause a catastrophe, not to do harm.

Mom and Dad, I cannot thank you enough for your unending patience, support, and love. I profoundly appreciate all that you have done for me throughout my life and especially during these past five years of rabbinical school. Know that wherever I go and whatever I do in life, I will always remember your love.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible
AIIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
BISB	Big Ideas/Small Books
BPW	*Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings* [*BPW*]. Edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi. Studies in Continental Thought. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
EN	Emmanuel Levinas. *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*. Translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
HALOT	*Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*
IIRB	*Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by Jill Robbins. Meridian Crossing Aesthetics. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.
JPSTC	The JPS Torah Commentary
JSB	Berlin, Adele, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael Fishbane, editors. *The Jewish Study Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup.	JSOT Supplement Series
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
OTL	The Old Testament Library
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NOABNRSV	Coogan, Michael D. et al., editors. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version; An Ecumenical Study Bible*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

VPA Bufacchi, Vittorio, editor. *Violence: A Philosophical Anthology* [*VPA*]. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

INTRODUCTION

> The Bible, of all books, is the most dangerous one, the one that has been endowed with the power to kill. — Mieke Bal[1]

The Hebrew Bible arguably contains the most violence among the various sacred texts of the world's major religions.[2] It has "almost 200 texts about violence against children,"[3] "over *six hundred* passages that explicitly talk about nations, kings, or individuals attacking, destroying, and killing others. …approximately one thousand verses in which Yahweh himself appears as the direct executioner of violent punishments…[and] over one hundred other passages [where] Yahweh expressly gives the command to kill people."[4] In light of these horrifying numbers, Mark Harold McEntire's argument comes as no surprise: "That the plot of the Hebrew Bible pivots on acts of violence illustrates that violence is a central, if not the central, issue for the entire text."[5] Given the predominance of violence in the Bible, Philip Jenkins appropriately writes, "If Christians or Jews needed biblical texts to justify deeds of terrorism or ethnic slaughter, their main problem would be an embarrassment of riches."[6] Indeed, Eric A. Seibert remarks how "a number of books have appeared, highlighting the destructive way the Bible has been used

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[1] Mieke Bal, *On Story-Telling: Essays in Narratology*, ed. David Jobling, Foundations and Facets (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1991), 14.
[2] Philip Jenkins, *Laying Down the Sword: Why We Can't Ignore the Bible's Violent Verses* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).
[3] Andreas Michel, "Sexual Violence against Children in the Bible," trans. John Bowden, in *The Structural Betrayal of Trust*, ed. Regina Ammicht-Quinn, Hille Haker, and Maureen Junker-Kenny, Concilium 3 (London: SCM Press, 2004), 51.
[4] Raymund Schwager, *Must There be Scapegoats?: Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, trans Maria L. Assad (Herefordshire: Gracewing / New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 47, 60.
[5] Mark Harold McEntire, *The Blood of Abel: The Violent Plot of the Hebrew Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 6. McEntire quotes Schwager on page 4.
[6] Jenkins, *Laying Down the Sword*, 6.

to hurt others." Citing *The Sins of Scripture* and *The Savage Text* among other works,[7] he explains:

> These books…help people recognize how the Bible has often been read in ways that foster injustice, oppression, and death. Biblical texts have been used to justify such things as warfare and genocide, violence against women, child abuse, religious intolerance, capital punishment, slavery, bigotry, and racism. The Old Testament has frequently been used in these ways, resulting in what I refer to as "the Old Testament's troubling legacy."[8]

Sadly, the present has inherited this biblical bequest, and it seems likely that this gift will keep on giving for some time. Whereas some scholars plumb the history of this troubling legacy, others examine how the Bible galvanizes people today to commit violence. Studies that explore this phenomenon matter because scripturally motivated violence kills. Of course, the Bible itself does not do the killing; readers do, and, for this reason, among others, an ethics of reading the Bible carries tremendous importance.[9]

Ethics of Reading

"What could this mean, the ethics of reading?", J. Hillis Miller asks:

> Is it not a solecism, a somewhat misleading way of saying "reading books for their ethical content or import"? What is the force of the genitive of in my title? Which way does it go? Does it mean a mode of ethics or of ethical action generated by reading, deriving from it, or does it mean an

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[7] John Shelby Spong, *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005); Adrian Thatcher, *The Savage Text: The Use and Abuse of the Bible* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008). For more books that Seibert cites, see Eric A. Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 2, 163, n. 7.

[8] Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior*, 2.

[9] See Gary A. Phillips and Danna Nolan Fewell, "Ethics, Bible, Reading as If," *Semeia 77*, "Bible and Ethics of Reading" (1997): 1-3. said, the ethics of reading examined in this thesis does not explore the history of the Bible's troubling legacy because many valuable books already do. Moreover, my thesis does not attempt a comprehensive explanation of why people have committed violence out of scriptural inspiration, still do commit it, and will likely do so in the future. Most people do not perpetrate violence out of biblical conviction; only religious extremists do and for obvious reasons. They partly derive their morals from scripture, read the Bible literally, and inflict violence according to the divine word. I do not deal with this matter, then, because I find it intellectually uninteresting and largely irrelevant to liberal Jewish communities.

> ethics intrinsic to reading, remaining within it? …In what sense can or should the act of reading be itself ethical or have an ethical import? Should not reading be thought of as primarily cognitive, as a matter of understanding what is said, after which some ethical use of that reading might or might not be made, but in any case as something extraneous to the primary act of reading as such?[10]

With his characteristically probing curiosity and penetrating questions, Miller identifies two possible meanings of *the ethics of reading*. The first takes the "force of the genitive of" to fall on ethics such that *the ethics of reading* "mean[s] a mode of ethics or of ethical action generated by reading, deriving from it."[11] *The ethics of reading*, in this light, means a certain approach to ethics both in thought and in deed that the act of reading somehow triggers. The second understands the genitive as a possessive such that one may substitute *reading's ethics* for *the ethics of reading*. Here, *the ethics of reading* parallels medical ethics in that both concern the ethics peculiar to a specific discipline, art, or activity. *The ethics of reading*, in this sense, denotes the ethics in which the reader becomes involved in the act of reading. Following Denis Donoghue, I refer to the first type of ethics of reading as "[e]pireading…which…transpos[es] the written words on the page into a somehow corresponding human situation of persons, voices, characters, conflicts, conciliations."[12] Epireaders, as Jan Ceuppens puts it, "look at texts as though they were windows on another world which, while separate, is not so different from our own and therefore offers possibilities of identification and modelling…Indeed, this is

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[10] J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 1.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Denis Donoghue, *Ferocious Alphabets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 101.

where literature finds its justification: it can offer a very practical laboratory for ways of behaving ethically—a 'dry run' for real-life behavior." [13]

Wayne C. Booth's work exemplifies epireading, according to Ceuppens.[14] In *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Booth, as an Aristotelian, takes "ethical" to encompass "the entire range of effects on the 'character' or person or 'self.' 'Moral judgments' are only a small part of it."[15] In his ethics of reading, then, he explores how and why different works of fiction positively and negatively affect the reader's character.[16] I use Booth relatively little in this thesis because I do not hold an Aristotelian view of ethics. That said, I do find the following questions that he poses quite helpful: "*What Are the Reader's Responsibilities to the Writer—the Flesh-and-Blood Author or Career Author?...What Are the Reader's Responsibilities to the Work of Art—Which is to Say, to the Implied Author?...What Are the Reader's Responsibilities to His or Her Own Self or Soul—as Flesh-and-Blood Reader?...What Are the Reader's Responsibilities to Other Individual Readers?...What Are the Reader's Responsibilities to Society, beyond the Honest Expression of Critical Judgment?*"[17] These questions identify responsibility as a fundamental characteristic of ethics in general and ethics of reading in particular. Booth's first question, however, is not relevant to my ethics of reading because the flesh-and-blood or career authors of the Bible died more than two millennia ago. Nevertheless, the reader has an obligation not only to the work of literature but also to the "implied

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[13] Jan Ceuppens, "Transcripts: An Ethics of Representation in *The Emigrants*," in *W. G. Sebald: History, Memory, Trauma*, ed. Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh, 260 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006).
[14] Ibid.
[15] Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1989), 8.
[16] Ibid., 166.
[17] Ibid., 134-136.

author"—Booth's neologism that denotes not the actual author but the figure that the reader through implicature imagines to have written the literary work.[18] Although Booth equates the reader's responsibility to the literary work and implied author, I do not.

To explain why, I introduce the work of J. Hillis Miller. Robert Eagelstone classifies him as a graphireader,[19] one who, in Donoghue's words, "deals with writing as such"[20] and accordingly does not see literature as an "ethical playground," in Eva Maria Koopman's words.[21] Miller argues, "The ethics of reading begins with the reader's response to parallel demand that each text be read, and even read again and again. This response begins and remains in a painful double bind. Each book, text, essay, scrap of written language, even in those languages I do not know, asks to be read. The call is directed to me personally and with equal force by each text."[22] Although I cannot read all of world literature, I can and must read the entire Hebrew Bible, including the ethically problematic material, some of which I analyze in the following chapters.

To return to Booth, my responsibility to the implied author consists in the demand that the reader executes a legitimate reading of the writer's work. By *legitimate reading*, I partly mean an act of reading wherein one tries to understand the text in the way(s) that its author(s) intended. "However," as David H. Aaron writes:

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[18] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983),157-158.
[19] Robert Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), chap. 3.
[20] Donoghue, *Ferocious Alphabets*, 151, cited in Alan Holder, *Rethinking Meter: A New Approach to the Verse Lin* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press / London: Associated University Press, 1995), 235.
[21] Eva Maria Koopman, "Reading Rape: Toward an Ethics of Responding to Literary Depictions of Suffering and Violence" (master's thesis, Utrecht University, 2010), 5, https://dspace.library.uu.nl/bitstream/1874/179303/1/Reading+Rape_EMKoopman.pdf.
[22] J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," in *The J. Hillis Miller Reader*, 41-42 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

> there is no question that a text can have meanings that an author did not intend. This is to acknowledge that the overwhelming majority of engagements with language (spoken and written) are imperfect and entail innumerable indeterminacies. Many ambiguities are irresolvable; others can be worked through, although perhaps never fully. …Indeed, there is no such thing as a perfect reading. There are bad readings and there are good readings. Some good readings are better than others, and some bad readings are worse than others. We can measure the merits of readings against one another, but we have no way to retrieve our ancient authors to verify just how close our readings are to their intentions.
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> What, then, will our shared strategies be in this context? The first step in consideration of each passage will be to establish the core of an informed reading. By "an informed reading" I mean an interpretation of a passage that emerges on the basis of a variety of language- and literature-related scholarly tools of potential relevance.

Legitimate readings, then, utilize tools from religious and literary studies, theory and philosophy, history and archaeology, anthropology and sociology, philology and linguistics, and much, much more. I expend a great deal time in much of this thesis developing legitimate readings of the biblical material that I engage.

Legitimate readings also presuppose that a panoply of human writers and redactors gave shape to the Hebrew Bible and that they had different styles of writing and competing ideologies. The author's intended meaning, then, *partially* constitutes what scholars call *authorial intent*, partially because that term also designates the "design or plan in the author's mind. Intention has obvious affinities for the author's attitude toward his work, the way he felt, what made him write."[23] Like a number of other scholars, Aaron argues that the Bible

> was written as a solution to a historical problem—the destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE and the emergence of a diasporic Jewish community whose identity could not be based exclusively, or even predominantly, upon the salience of the Land of Israel and its core institutions…[T]he…[Bible] represents among the most creative solutions

[23] W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M. C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (July-September 1946): 468-469.

> to a historical problem ever proposed: the perpetuation of a civilization and the creation of a sense of social unity *through literature*.[24]

My understanding of the composition of the Hebrew Bible follows the model that Aaron here proposes. Like him, I also stress the ideological character of biblical literature. After all, in the ancient world, socio-economic conditions—where few people could read and fewer still even write and the education to obtain these skills, not to mention the writing materials, cost a great deal—restricted writing to the occupation of professional scribes whom the elite would commission to advance their interests.[25] Although I try to fulfill my obligation to biblical readers by developing legitimate readings, I also go further and attempt to discern why they wrote what they did, for the ideological goals that motivated them were far from innocent. In many if not most cases, in fact, they served the interests of the elite and at the expense of others.

As a reader, I also have a responsibility to myself, namely that I maintain my intellectual integrity. As such, the readings that I share with other people need to reflect my critical-historical understanding of the text. As the same time, however, I, as a teacher and future rabbi, must ensure that my readings—whether in classes, sermons, articles, etc.—provide some sort of meaning without harming fellow readers. In my ethics of reading, then, my most important responsibility is to others. This notion of responsibility to others lies at the heart of my understanding of ethics, which largely follows that of the

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[24] David H. Aaron, *Genesis Ideology: Essays on the Use and Meanings of Stories* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 4. Here, Aaron speaks specifically of the Torah. However, having studied with him, I know that he has the same view on the composition of the entire Hebrew Bible.

[25] Ehud Ben Zvi, "Introduction: Writings, Speeches, and the Prophetic Books—Setting an Agenda," in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, Ehud Ben Zvi and Michael H. Floyd, eds., Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 5.

Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas. I now turn to summarize the most relevant aspects of his thought.

Emmanuel Lévinas: The Priority of Ethics

When writing about his conception of ethics, Lévinas often alluded to Vasily Grossman's novel, *Life and Fate*, which in part recounts the World War II Battle of Stalingrad and its aftermath.[26] In a scene after the defeat of the Nazis, some German prisoners of war carry out Russian corpses from a bombed out-building's basement. One particular Nazi prisoner of war, suffering more severely than his German compatriots,[27] draws the attention of a Russian woman who sees him carrying the corpse of a young, blonde girl. Overcome with pain and grief, the woman cries out, "'My child! My child! My golden child!'" Immediately, she picks up a brick, rises to her feet, rushes towards the soldier—his dismal fate all too sure—and *inexplicably*, *instead*, gives him a piece "of bread."[28]

Lévinas refers to moments like this one as the "face-to-face." This neologism designates real, (not theoretical) instances or events in which any individual as the first person,[29] I, encounters a second person whom Lévinas calls the Other and responds to his/her "face." But face has a unique meaning for Lévinas. He explains:

> In *Life and Fate* Grossman tells how in Lubyanka [prison], in Moscow, before the infamous gate where one could convey letters or packages to friends and relatives arrested for "political crimes" or get news of them, people formed a line, each reading on the nape of the person in front of him the feelings and hopes of his misery…Grossman isn't saying that the

[26] Michael L. Morgan, an undergraduate course taken by the author, January 16, 2014, Indiana University, Bloomington.
[27] Ibid.; Vasily Grossman, *Life and Fate*, trans. Robert Chandler, New York Review Books Classics (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006), 803.
[28] Ibid., 805.
[29] Michael Morgan, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 59.

> nape is a face, but that all the weakness, all the mortality, all the naked and disarmed mortality of the other can be read from it. I call *face* that which in the other regards the I—regards me—reminding me…of his abandonment, his defenselessness, and his mortality, and his appeal to my ancient responsibility, as if he were unique in the world, beloved."[30]

Lévinas does not mean that people literally encounter each other face to face, for "face" does not refer to a physical visage; rather, it is a metaphor for that which reveals the Other's fragility, vulnerability, "mortality," and dependency on the first person, on me, the I.

To have a face, the Other need neither talk, look, or act like the I nor be destitute, ill, or visibly suffering, for, as Abraham Joshua Heschel keenly observes, "We are all patients…We all have suffering in common. Scratch the skin of any human being and you come upon some degree of helplessness, misery, or even agony."[31] Everyone suffers; everyone has pain, some more and some less but pain regardless. By revealing the nakedness and destitution, the fragility and mortality of the other, the face renders the Other different than I, for "otherness," Morgan explains, "is wholly a matter of status."[32] As Lévinas writes, "The Other…is the weak, the poor, the 'widow and the orphan,' whereas I am the rich or the powerful."[33] Lévinas does not literally mean that the Other is impoverished and I rich. Instead, he uses these descriptions metaphorically. The Other is poor because s/he needs my help; I am rich because I can offer succor with attentiveness

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[30] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Other, Utopia, and Justice" (1985), trans. Jill Robbins and Thomas Loebel, in *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 204, 208. What follows the squiggly line actually appears on page 204; what precedes the squiggly line appears on page 208. On the scene that Lévinas describes, see Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 681.
[31] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Patient as a Person," in *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1966), 24.
[32] Morgan, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas*, 61.
[33] Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 83.

to his/her specific needs. In the face-to-face, then, I answer the Other's plea not with a universal response but always a "particular" one.[34]

The example of the old woman giving her piece of bread to the Nazi illustrates many key features of the face-to-face, but I shall only discuss three of them. First, when I encounter the face, I *must* respond. The woman who gave her bread to the Nazi neither thought to herself, "You shall help the stranger," nor did she act out of sense of guilt. On the contrary, as Grossman writes, "she was unable to understand…why she had done this,"[35] why she, who had every reason to murder this Nazi, instead gave him a morsel of bread.[36] For Lévinas, this moment demonstrates that even when people bear the utmost hatred for each other, there mysteriously remains a sense of "mercy," of empathy, of responsibility to and for the Other.[37] It shows that the face summons me with a command that I cannot refuse. Of course, Lévinas recognizes that people rarely give their "bread" to those who need it most because he understands the face-to-face as an extraordinary event. It rarely transpires,[38] but, when it does, I have no choice but to act on behalf of the Other. Indeed, Lévinas develops terminology to capture the choicelessness of the I's response to the Other. He calls the face-to-face obsession since the Other obsesses the I in a with responsibility. He says, "[T]he obsessional accusation [the call of the face to the I] is a persecution. It strips the Ego [the I] of its self-conceit and its dominating imperialism."[39]

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[34] Morgan, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas*, 112.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Emmanuel Levinas, interview with Myriam Anissimov (1985), trans. Jill Robbins and Thomas Loebel, in *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 89.
[38] Morgan, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas*, 43ff.
[39] Emmanuel Levinas, "Substitution" (1968), trans. Simon Critchley, Peter Atterton, and Graham Noctor, in *BPW*, 88.

He describes the I, "[o]bsessed with responsibilities" to and for the Other, as "[b]acked up against itself, because the self is in itself without recourse to anything, in itself as one in one's skin (and…to be in one's skin is an extreme way of being exposed…)."[40] As this language suggests, "Levinas, of course," Morgan explains, "takes the face-to-face to involve violence, but it is a beneficial violence and not coercive in the injurious or negative sense. This language of violence for Lévinas is part of the metaphorical description that he uses to distinguish the sense of burden and obligation to others that is, for him, foundational for all moral normativity."[41] He also uses *revelation* not to refer to the theophany in Exodus but instead to the face-to-face.[42] The face, then, is the Mount Sinai of Lévinas' revelation, and it involves a beneficent type of violence, which I capture in the first part of the subtitle of my thesis, "Toward the Violence of Revelation."

Lévinas explains the choicelessness that besets the I who witnesses the revelation of the Other's face with the notion that my ethical obligation to heed the cry of the Other precedes thought and emotion, sensation and action, and even time itself.[43] As a result, the second feature of the face-to-face is that I am everywhere always already responsible to and for the Other. Third and finally, this responsibility is infinite; at no point, do I fulfill my obligations to the Other, for there always remains more that I can do to assuage his/her pain.

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[40] Ibid., 88-89.
[41] Michael L. Morgan, *Levinas's Ethical Politics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 2016), 367, n. 4.
[42] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Hardness of Philosophy and the Consolations of Religion" (1981), in *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 113; Morgan, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas*, 167-168.
[43] Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Height" (1962), trans. Simon Critchley with Tina Chanter and Nicholas Walker, in *BPW* 19; idem., "Meaning and Sense" (1964), trans. Alphonso Lingis and Adiraan Peperzak with Simon Critchley, in ibid., 60-61; idem., "Essence and Disinterestedness" (1974), trans. Alphonso Lingis and Adiraan Peperzak with Simon Critchley, in ibid., 117.

To say that Lévinas simply advocates for altruism and more selflessness diminishes the radical nature of his claim. He argues that I must fulfill my responsibilities to and for the other before I fulfill those to myself. Morgan observes:

> [O]ur obligations to others always take priority and... they are extreme…in the sense that there are no limits to these obligations. We are responsible for others, all the time, in every way. This extreme formulation says more than that we ought to care about others; it says that our obligations to them always override any other interest or value we have and that no matter how much we give or share with others, there is always more that we can and should do. Furthermore…we should always sacrifice ourselves and any of our own self-interests or desires in favor of the other person; I should always care more about what others need from me than what I want to do or to have. Indeed, Levinas seems to be saying that everything we do should be judged by this standard. No decision I make should neglect to consider what effect my decision or action would have on the others to whom I am responsible. If an action cannot be justified in terms of what good it can do for others, then it should not be performed.[44]

Lévinas' insistence on the I's infinite responsibility to and for every other person leads him to ask, "It is not only the question 'Is my life righteous?' but rather, 'Is it righteous to be?'"[45] That is, I cannot possibly fulfill my infinite obligations to the Other. At the very least, I have to sleep, eat, and drink; yet, in doing so, I serve myself instead of others. Were I truly ethical, I would always give my food, water, shelter, wealth, time, and energy to the Other, but I do not. That fact raises the question, "'Is it righteous to be?'"[46] "Do I have a right to be?"[47] "Does our very being legitimate our wish to be? It is…a matter of…finding reasons for being, for meriting being."[48] In this thesis, I ask a similar but more targeted question: "Is it righteous to read? Do I have a right to read? Does my

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[44] Morgan, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas*, 11-12.
[45] Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality Has Weight" (1984), in *IIRB*, 163.
[46] Levinas, "Reality Has Weight" (1984), interview with Christian Descamps, in *IIRB*, 163.
[47] Idem., "Who Shall Not Prophesy?" (1985), interview with Angelo Bianchi, in *IIRB*, 225.
[48] Idem., "The Philosopher and Death" (1982), interview with Christian Chabanis, in *IIRB*, 128.

reading legitimate my wish to read? It is a matter of finding reasons for reading, for meriting reading.

Liberal Jewry's Avoidance of Biblical Violence and the Goal of This Thesis

Does not reading the Bible, a sacred text, differ from reading secular literature? That is, does not the Bible teach ethics such that reading it in and of itself constitutes a good? Liberal Jews answer these questions in the affirmative. Indeed, clergy frequently offer readings, conveying rich and deep ethical and spiritual messages, that positively shape other readers' lives. As a nascent rabbi, I myself engage in this practice. I take issue, however, because rabbis, cantors, educators, lay people, and even academics genuinely believe that the Bible contains ethical values. I firmly disagree with this conviction because I see the Bible as a deeply ideological work, written by the elite in the interests of the elite. Often, a seemingly ethical message masks an alarming ideological enterprise. Readers discover the disturbing character of the Bible most directly in narratives of violence, from which liberal Jewish clergy, I believe, tend to shy away, for these stories do not seem to contain ethical values at all—this suspicion only confirms my earlier argument that the Bible has ideology but not ethics—and, as a result, they frequently do not fulfill all of their responsibilities as readers. If they force an ethical message, then they shirk their obligation to the implied author to execute a legitimate reading. If, instead, they simply avoid biblical violence, they neglect their responsibility to the Bible itself. That is, they do not read the Bible in full but instead provide readings that engage those parts of scripture that lend themselves most easily to ethically and spiritually meaningful messages. In this thesis, then, I aim to model how liberal Jewish

leaders might develop legitimate *readings* that move *towards the violence of revelation*.[49] By that italicized phrase, I mean readings that convey an ethical message and thus promote the face-to-face and the good violence involved in it *and*, at the same time, readings that critically engage biblical violence.

The Thesis and an Overview of This Thesis

I argue that to move towards the violence of revelation in this dual sense, an ethics of reading biblical violence must combine plausible historical-critical readings (legitimate readings) with resisting readings, which, following Eryl W. Davies, openly engage problematic biblical texts and offer ethical critiques of them.[50] Firmly rooted in the Bible as literature, these readings must then move beyond the sacred text as the discourse that they yield comes to inform how a liberal Jewish community of readers ethically and politically engages with people and society in a world of violence.

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[49] By "liberal," I mean religiously liberal.

[50] Judith Fetterley first coined this terminology in her book, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*. Because she "presume[s] that we read and that what we read affects us—drenches us, to use [Adrienne] Rich's language, in its assumptions, and that to avoid drowning in this drench of assumptions we must learn to re-read," she identifies her "book as a self-defense survival manual for the woman reader lost in 'the masculine wilderness of the American novel.'" Judith Fetterley, preface and introduction to *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), viii. Eryl W. Davies adapts this paradigm as an approach to read what he calls "ethically problematic passages of Scripture….Resisting readers," as Davies sees it:

> ethically problematic passages of Scripture….Resisting readers feel that they have a duty to converse and interact with the text, and believe that literary compositions should be read in an openly critical, rather than in a *passively* receptive, way. Instead of tacitly accepting the standards of judgment established in the text and capitulating uncritically to its demands, they are prepared to challenge its assumptions, to question its insights, and (if necessary) to discredit its claims. …In brief, they may want to read "against the grain" of the text and call its content into account in their own court of ethical judgment.
>
> According to this approach, then, reading…opens itself up to a kind of dialogue between two interlocutors, and readers are challenged to contribute to the conversation with their own questions and reactions. …The reaction of the reader is regarded as of paramount importance. [Eryl W. Davies, *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 1, 120-121.]

In chapter one, I approach different ways of defining violence, adopt one scholar's definition, explore Hannah Arendt's utilitarian characterization of violence, and develop some taxonomies for studying this bloody phenomenon. Chapter two surveys some of the many functions of biblical violence serves, and chapter three does likewise but focuses solely on Psalm 106. In chapter four, I turn to Numbers 16-17:5, which recounts the incineration of Korah and the earth's consumption of Dathan and Abiram. Finally, I conclude by reading what Judges 19-21. Depicting gangrape and dismemberment, near genocide, and the capture of hundreds of innocent women, these three chapters contain what I regard as the most disturbing acts of violence in the Hebrew Bible.

CHAPTER ONE

INVESTIGATING VIOLENCE

"[L]es problèmes relatifs à la violence sont demeurés jusqu'ici très obscurs."
–Georges Sorel, 1906[51]

"[W]hat Sorel remarked sixty years ago…is as true today as it was then."
–Hannah Arendt, 1969[52]

"We can confidently say that what Arendt remarked 40 years ago is also as true today as it was then." –Vittorio Bufacchi, 2005[53]

Defining Violence

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines violence as "The deliberate exercise of physical force against a person, property, etc.; physically violent behaviour or treatment."[54] This definition demonstrates how violence and force "in many contexts…become synonyms. But in human affairs," Newton Garver rightly writes, "violence and force cannot be equated." Otherwise, holding hands, buckling infants into their car seats, and performing lifesaving surgery would necessarily constitute acts of violence, and to hold such a position "would be to lose sight entirely of the significance of the concept."[55] *Merriam-Webster* more usefully describes violence as "the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy."[56] Yet. does not chemotherapy that destroys lethal tumors become violent in this light? Should one instead suggest that violence denotes "the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy

[51] Georges Sorel, preface to the first publication (1906), *Réflexions sur la violence* (Paris: Librairie de « Pages libres, » 1908), 5.
[52] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 35.
[53] Vittorio Bufacchi, "Two Concepts of Violence," *Political Studies Review* 3 (2005): 199.
[54] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "violence," accessed March 1, 2019, http://www.oed.com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/view/Entry/223638?rskey=3EPXXU&result=1&isAdvanced=false.
[55] Newton Garver, "What Violence Is," *The Nation*, June 24, 1968, 819.
[56] *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "violence," accessed March 1, 2019, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/violence.

a living being in such a way that is detrimental to its health"[57]? This description suffers from inadequacies as well. After all, an armed thief, who sincerely has no desire to harm other human beings, may press his gun to a storeowner's head to compel the proprietor to hand over all the cash without ever firing his weapon or striking someone with it. It seems that violence violates all definitions.

These difficulties notwithstanding, this study does require a definition of violence regardless of its inevitable shortcomings. Fortunately, the foregoing discussion provides an ideal jumping-off point, for every definition has to draw boundaries that either diminish or enlarge any given word's semantic field—what David Crystal defines as "a named area of meaning in which lexemes interrelate and define each other in specific ways"[58]— and it so happens that where one demarcates the defining lines of violence hinges on how one conceives of that concept's relationship with force, especially of the physical kind. As Vittorio Bufacchi writes:

> There are two ways of thinking about violence: in terms of an act of force, or in terms of a violation. Those who define violence as an intentional act of excessive or destructive force endorse a narrow conception of violence (the Minimalist Conception of Violence or MCV), while those who see violence in terms of a violation of rights champion a broader conception of violence (the Comprehensive Conception of Violence or CCV).[59]

What Bufacchi terms the Minimalist Conception of Violence and the Comprehensive Conception of Violence other scholars, with different emphases, have respectively called "observational,"[60]

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[57] Ibid.
[58] David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 2005), s. v. "semantic fields." Crystal defines lexeme as "a unit of lexical meaning, which exists regardless of any inflectional endings [e. g. –ed, -ing, -s] it may have or the number of words it may contain." For lexemes that contain multiple words, Crystal offers as examples "*rain cats and dogs…put up with*, *face the music*." Ibid., s.v. "lexeme."
[59] Vittorio Bufacchi, "Two Concepts of Violence," *Political Studies Review* 3 (2005): 3.
[60] Kenneth W. Grundy and Michael A. Weinstein, *The Ideologies of Violence* (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1974), 9.

"restricted,"[61] or "subjective,"[62] and "expansive and ethical,"[63] "wide,"[64] and "objective."[65] Bufacchi, who notes many of these alternative terminologies,[66] explores each approach's "strengths and weaknesses."[67] Despite "the important advantage of delineating clear boundaries around what constitutes an act of violence," the MCV, "by restricting acts of violence to intentional, direct, physical acts against other persons…misses out on too many other important dimensions of the phenomenon of violence."[68] By contrast, the CCV accounts for these dimensions and attends to violence in all its different manifestations.[69] Nonetheless, because of its expansiveness, the CCV quite possibly renders "violence ubiquitous and meaningless."[70] As Joseph Betz writes, "If violence is violating a person or a person's rights, then every social wrong is a violent one, every crime against another a violent crime, every sin against one's neighbor an act of violence."[71]

I opt for a narrow definition of violence, particularly that of Robert Audi. He writes:

> Violence is the physical attack upon, or the rigorous physical abuse of, or vigorous physical struggle against, a person or animal; or the highly vigorous psychological abuse of, or the sharp, caustic psychological attack upon, a person or animal; or the highly vigorous, or incendiary, or malicious and vigorous, destruction or damaging of property or potential property. In addition, let me emphasize an important point which I take to be implicit in the terms of the definition: that violence to animate beings tends to involve or cause their suffering or injury or both.

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[61] C. A. J. Coady, "The Idea of Violence," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (1986): 193.
[62] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 1.
[63] Kenneth W. Grundy and Michael A. Weinstein, *The Ideologies of Violence* (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1974), 9.
[64] Coady, "The Idea of Violence," 3.
[65] Žižek, *Violence*, 1.
[66] Bufacchi, "Two Concepts of Violence," 201, n. 21, 25.
[67] Ibid., 193.
[68] Bufacchi further argues, "Another problem with the MCV is that it seems to be oblivious to the most pervasive and destructive form of violence: structural or institutional violence." Ibid., 197.
[69] Ibid., 198; Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167-191.
[70] Bufacchi, "Two Concepts of Violence," 197.
[71] Joseph Betz, "Violence: Garver's Definition and a Deweyan Correction," *Ethics* 87, no. 4 (1977): 341.

> …I shall not attempt to give a definition of 'vigorous abuse,' but it should be of some help to say that, typically, vigorous abuse of persons is very rough treatment, especially shoving, punching, dragging, slapping, stabbing, slashing, trampling, crushing, burning, and shooting. Vigorous psychological abuse may be thought of, in rough terms, as the psychological counterpart of these abuses, and it is usually accompanied by sharp tones and screaming and often by insults and threats; but the definition allows for the possibility that psychological violence may be perpetrated without words, as where only inarticulate screams and threatening gestures are used, or in writing, as in the case of a scathing and strident diatribe.[72]

By no means perfect, Audi's definition has more than several difficulties as he himself acknowledges.[73] "The most serious difficulty for the definition" concerns "the existence of cases in which it does not provide a sufficient condition for violence." Audi calls such circumstances "borderline cases,"[74] and he offers the example of "the use of poisonous gases or deadly bacteria."[75]

These challenges notwithstanding, Audi's definition carefully walks the line between the MCV and CCV. As Bufacchi writes, "As a single, comprehensive definition of violence, what Audi is proposing deserves much praise. By suggesting that 'the notion of vigorous abuse comes very close to forming a kind of core', Audi allows not only for the fact that at the receiving end of an act of violence we find either animate beings or inanimate objects, but that the act of violence itself can be measured in either physical or psychological terms."[76] At the same time, his definition does not count social injustice as a form of violence like Johann Galtung does.[77]

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[72] Robert Audi, "On the Meaning and Justification of Violence," in *Violence: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. Vittorio Bufacchi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 143-144.
[73] Robert Audi, "On the Meaning and Justification of Violence," in *Violence: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. Vittorio Bufacchi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 144-151.
[74] Ibid., 146-147.
[75] Ibid., 139.
[76] Vittorio Bufacchi, "Commentary on Audi," in *Violence: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. Vittorio Bufacchi, 168 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
[77] Galtung uses "*structural* or *indirect*" violence to designate "social injustice." Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," 170-171.

Moreover, Audi's definition notably does not use *aggression*, *force*, or *power*. These words, in addition to *authority*, *coercion*, *control*, and *strength* as well as many others all belong to violence's semantic field. By avoiding these terms, each of which's meaning remains debatable, Audi offers a clear definition with a minimum of ambiguities.

Approaches to a Taxonomy of Violence

Different definitions of violence lead to different taxonomies. Since the CCV counts social injustices as forms of violence, it must differentiate assault and murder from systemic racism and poverty. Fortunately, having adopted the MCV, I do not have to make that distinction. I do however need to develop some way of examining violence. Typically, both the MCV and CCV distinguishes between physical and psychological violence. Physical violence, they say, denotes violence inflicted on the body whereas psychological violence refers to violence done to the psyche.

Although I understand this tendency, I reject it because it views the body and the mind as qualitatively different and physically separate entities. Against René Descartes' triumphant declaration, "*je pense, donc je suis,*"[78] which inaugurated this mind-body duality, I maintain that this idea is a fallacy. A person's psyche or mind is not disembodied but embodied; it forms part of his/her brain. The notion that emotional trauma constitutes psychological but not physical violence does not reflect the latest scientific understanding of reality. When I speak of *psychological violence*, then, I mean a specific type of violence, one that "do[es] not occupy space" but uses the victim's "psychology" to do violence to the victim. For example, a husband who repeatedly urges his wife to kill herself on account of her worthlessness perpetrates a type of

[78] René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduir sa raison, et chercher la verité dans les sciences*, Librio 299 (Leiden, 1637; Paris: Librio, 2001), 36. Citations refer to the Librio edition. Emphasis original to the text.

psychological violence called *verbal violence*, for he uses speech as a weapon. However, neither the physiological pronunciation of words nor the accompanying soundwaves that issue from his mouth and register in the woman's brain constitute speech. Strictly speaking, speech exists only as a concept, a firing of neurons in the brain that nonetheless is not reducible to speech. Speech, then, "do[es] not occupy space;" nonetheless, it harms the woman's psyche.

While I retain the terminology of *psychological violence*, I do away with the language of *physical violence*, for the word, *physical*, would seem to suggest that psychological violence does not affect the body when, as I have shown, it in fact does. Instead of physical, then, I choose to use more exacting terminology that describes the general area of the human body that suffers from violence. Thus, a person who beats another with a bat commits *gross violence* by which I mean he perpetrates an act of violence that targets immediately accessible parts of the victim's body. Gross violence thus includes punching, kicking, whipping, strangling, stabbing, shooting, and more. *Sexual violence*, by contrast, targets generally covered and private parts of the body, and the victim must experience the attack as an uninvited sexual advance. I offer these three taxa with the following qualifications. First, the boundaries that distinguish one form of violence from the other are porous. Second, and as a result of the first, there are indeed hybrid types of violence. For example, one may sexually abuse another through verbal violence. Third, each of these taxa contain subcategories of further forms of violence.

In this thesis, I will use both the schema that I have just presented and additional an taxonomy in which I examine violence in terms of its function. This type of analysis asks, "To what end does so-and-so perform an act of violence? What function does it serve, and what does the perpetrator hope to accomplish?" These questions matter because they not only force me to suspend my presuppositions about biblical violence but also help me "recognize authorial goals,"

as David H. Aaron says. This functional approach capitalizes on one of Hannah Arendt's key observations about violence.

Hannah Arendt on Violence as a Means towards an End

Arendt has two major insights into the phenomenon of violence. In this chapter, I will discuss only the first, which concerns its utilitarian character.[79] Although she already speaks of "the *instruments* of violence" in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951),[80] she first develops this notion in *The Human Condition* (1958) where she explores "the three fundamental human activities: labor, work, and action."[81] Arendt defines work as "the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence." [82] With the word unnaturalness, she means the sense that human beings, although animals, do not merely subsist on the natural world; rather, they manipulate it to create what she calls the *human artifice*, "a place fit for habitation by all human beings."[83] "Work," then, "provides an 'artificial' world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings. Within its borders each individual life is housed, while this world itself is meant to outlast and transcend them all." [84] In short, Arendt uses the term *work* to designate the activity by which human beings create the human artifice.

Arendt also refers to work as fabrication.[85] "The work of fabrication," she explains, "is performed under the guidance of a model in accordance with which the object is constructed.

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[79] I will discuss her second insight in chapter four.
[80] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1951), 18. Emphasis added.
[81] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 7.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Jerome Kohn, "Totalitarianism: The Inversion of Politics," in Jerome Kohn, *Three Essays: The Role of Experience in Hannah Arendt's Political Thought*, https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/arendthtml/essayb5.html.
[84] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.
[85] Karin A. Fry equates the two. *Arendt: A Guide for the Perplexed*, GP (London: Continuum, 2009), 43.

This model can be an image beheld by the eye of the mind or a blueprint." [86] For this reason, then, Arendt states, "Fabrication…consists in reification."[87] Consider the construction of a carpenter's chair. First, she must conceive of it. She must imagine the size, style, and countless other details. Once she develops these ideas more fully, she creates a blueprint and sets about acquiring the necessary materials to make the chair. Yet, Arendt remarks:

> Material is already a product of human hands which have removed it from its natural location, either killing a life process, as in the case of the tree which must be destroyed in order to provide wood, or interrupting one of nature's slower processes, as in the case of iron, stone, or marble torn out of the womb of the earth. This element of violation and violence is present in all fabrication, and *homo faber,* the creator of the human artifice ["a place fit for habitation by all human beings"[88]], has always been a destroyer of nature.[89]

Work begins with humans' doing violence to the natural world. Although Arendt does not define this violence, she illustrates it with examples of actions that overturn the regular way of the world for the object affected. Each of these deeds also involve "the making of something into something else: the archetype of violence is, in a sense, the molding of nature into something that is no longer natural."[90] It bears emphasis that Arendt never characterizes the violence of fabrication as bad. On the contrary, as Richard J. Bernstein writes:

> Work, fabrication, making things is part of, and essential for, the human condition. It is through work that humans create a world—a world that is meant to outlast and transcend individual human lives. …[I]f creating such a world—a world that is a home for human beings and a fit place for action and speech—involves violence, then it becomes clear that violence is not intrinsically negative. It has its proper function in creating a human world, which involves a transformation of nature.[91]

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[86] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 140.
[87] Ibid., 139.
[88] Kohn, "Totalitarianism: The Inversion of Politics," https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/arendthtml/essayb5.html.
[89] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 139.
[90] Guido Parietti, "Arendt on Power and Violence," in *The Anthem Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr and Philip Walsh, Anthem Companions to Sociology Book 1 (London: Anthem Press, 2017), kindle locations 4403-4404.
[91] Richard J. Bernstein, "Hannah Arendt's Reflections on Violence and Power," *IRIS: European Journal of Philosophy and Public Debate* 3, no. 5 (April 2011): 18-19.

This conception of violence illuminates Arendt's later, more sophisticated conceptualization of violence, for instrumentalism characterizes humanity's attitude towards the natural world. In work, they view the earth as a resource that they can exploit to build a world more conducive to human habitation. The earth and what they extract from it serve as tools, means to an end. For Arendt, instrumentalism can become a dangerous mentality for politics as well.

Enter *On Violence*, her most sophisticated and comprehensive study of violence. She begins this book by saying, "These reflections were provoked by the events and debates of the last few years as seen against the background of the twentieth century, which has become indeed, as Lenin predicted, a century of wars and revolutions, hence a century of that violence which is commonly believed to be their common denominator."[92] Based on this opening context, Elizabeth Frazer intuits that "Arendt is interested in violence in the physical sense—it exacts injury on bodies by use of implements (bearing in mind that parts of the perpetrator's body can be used as weapons)."[93] Whether Arendt would have accepted psychological violence as violence remains unclear, but I suspect that she would have precisely because she also accepts that violence can be done to the natural world as well.[94] She thus has a more expansive understanding of violence and would seem to agree with Audi's definition.

Arendt defines violence in the following way: "*Violence*…is distinguished by its instrumental character. Phenomenologically, it is close to strength, since the implements of violence, like other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength until, in the last stage of their development, they can substitute for it."[95] The implements that

[92] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 3.
[93] Elizabeth Frazer, "Power and Violence," in *Hannah Arendt: Key Concepts*, ed. Patrick Hayden, 161 (Oxon: Routledge, 2014).
[94] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 139.
[95] Idem., *On Violence*, 46.

Arendt here mentions recall her earlier statement in *On Violence*: "violence…always needs *implements* (as Engels pointed out long ago)[96]…The very substance of violent action is ruled by the means-end category."[97] By "mean-end category," Arendt simply means that violence constitutes a means towards an end. She conveys the same concept when she speaks of the "instrumental character" that defines violence in *On Violence*. [98] Above all else, then, Arendt, sees violence as a tool to accomplish some goal. In the next chapter, I explore some of the diverse functions of violence in the Hebrew Bible.

[96] Friedrich Engels, *Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft* (1878), pt. II, chap. 3, cited in Arendt, *On Violence*, 4.
[97] Arendt, *On Violence*, 4.
[98] Ibid., 46.

CHAPTER TWO

VARIETIES OF VIOLENCE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Introduction

How does violence, in all its variety—for example, the numerous forms that it takes, the types of perpetrators and victims who, respectively commit and suffer it, and the degree of calculation and intentionality involved in it—remain the same phenomenon of violence? I do not intend to answer this question. I raise it for the sole reason that I regard it as one worthy of further study. In this chapter, then, I do not put forward an argument per say. Instead, I simply aim to show that the complexity that characterizes violence as an abstract phenomenon persists in violence's diverse manifestations. Towards that end, in what follows, I explore some of the many different functions that violence in the Hebrew Bible serves. Accordingly, this chapter constitutes an exception to the rest of my thesis, for the diversity of biblical violence's functions rather than an ethics of reading it concerns me here.

Corrective Violence

After Cain murders Abel, God commits the second act of violence in the Hebrew Bible in the story of Noah and the flood. The account begins, "[11]The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness [חָמָס]. [12]When God saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth, [13]God said to Noah, 'I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness [חָמָס] because of them: I am about to destroy them with the earth'" (Gen. 6:11-13). Jerome F. D. Creach writes that חָמָס "connotes rebellion against God that results in bloodshed and disorder and a general undoing of God's intentions for

creation."[99] Accordingly, Nahum M. Sarna posits, "From the divine enactments for the regulation of society after the Flood, detailed in chapter 9 [of Genesis], it may be deduced that *ḥamas* here refers predominantly to the arrogant disregard for the sanctity and inviolability of human life."[100] If correct, then Sarna's interpretation would suggest that, prior to the flood, murder and the consumption of live animals were commonplace. "Thus," Creach continues, "violence appears to intrude on God's world, and God acts destructively only to counteract human violence."[101] On the one hand, then, God floods the world to purge it of the iniquity that plagues it. On the other hand, violence not only purifies the world of human evil but also facilitates the creation of a supposedly better world. Sarna explains, "The flood is a cosmic catastrophe that is actually the undoing of creation. But God's chastisement and grace operate simultaneously, so that out of the disaster comes renewal."[102] To return to Creach, "[I]n Gen. 6:11-13 human violence ruined the earth and thus prompted God to bring the flood as a corrective measure."[103] Violence not only purifies but also enables God to create the world anew. This violence functions correctively.

Covenantal Violence

In her brilliant book, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, Regina M. Schwartz classifies Israelite identity formation as a violent process, and she demonstrates that the sealing of a covenant works in the same way. Schwartz writes:

> The Hebrew phrase for 'he made a covenant,' *kārat bĕrît*, is literally 'he cut a covenant,' and the violence of that ostensibly dead metaphor is dramatized in

[99] Jerome F. D. Creach, "Violence in the Old Testament," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. John Barton et al. (Oxford University Press, n. d.), article published July 2016, doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.154.
[100] Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 51.
[101] Creach, "Violence in the Old Testament," doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.154.
[102] Sarna, *Genesis*, 48.
[103] Creach, "Violence in the Old Testament," doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.154.

> each of the biblical ceremonies of the covenant: in the covenant with Abraham in Genesis where animals are cut in two and fire passes between them in a mysterious ritual, in the cutting of human flesh at circumcision—the so-called sign of the covenant—and in the covenant made at Mount Sinai where words are cut to inscribe the law in stone tablets.[104]

Under Audi's definition, Schwartz's last example would not constitute violence; however, her assertion regarding the violence of the cutting of the covenant at Sinai nevertheless remains true, for as God speaks, issuing commandments,

> [15][a]ll the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance. [16]"You speak to us," they said to Moses, "and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." [17]Moses answered the people, "Be not afraid; for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray." [18]So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was. [Ex. 20:15-18]

Although God neither strikes nor smites any person in this scene, the "the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking" terrify them to such an extent that they believe that were God to speak to them, they would die (Ex. 20:15). Psychological violence transpires here, and it seems that the people agree to obey God's law solely to avoid death.

Testing Violence

Despite God's tremendous power,[105] the deity does not enjoy omnipotence. God remains limited, and so divine knowledge remains limited as well. Just as teachers test students to determine the latter's extent of understanding of any given subject or discipline, so too God tests human beings in the Bible to ascertain their faithfulness and righteousness. In the case of Job, this testing takes the form of violence as the Adversary, with God's permission, proceeds to test Job's piety under the most extreme of circumstances. Job not only suffers financial ruin but also

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[104] Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 21.
[105] Here, I speak specifically of juridical power.

despairs when his children and brother tragically perish (Job 1:13-20). The Adversary strikes Job with "a severe inflammation" (Job 2:15), and he subsequently becomes subject to insomnia (Job 7:4), "maggots," and a dirt coated body whose cracked skin "festers" (Job 7:5). In the end, Job proves his piety. The testing violence fulfills its function: it provides God with a true understanding of Job's character.

Rewarding Violence

Since Israelite authors drew from the ancient Near East's cultural repertoire to compose the Hebrew Bible, many biblical stories share elements in common with other ancient Near Eastern literature.[106] Often, an element gets repeated within a work of literature, lending it an overarching theme. In some cases, writers might use one literary work's theme in their own creations. When multiple stories come to share the same theme, that theme becomes a motif, whose elements distinguish it from other motifs. For example, the account of Jacob's wrestling with an angel in Genesis 32:23-33 employs a motif that David H. Aaron calls "Encounter with a 'Stranger.'"[107] This motif contains four distinct elements:

1. Mysterious Encounter with an unidentified individual
2. Challenge, struggle, or query
3. Innocent character seeks individual's name/identity
4. Reward for perseverance involving identity or some other resolution[108]

Although the Encounter with a "Stranger" motif, once selected by the author for his composition, largely predetermined the narrative's structure, the author provided the story's substance by infusing these four elements with content. In this case, the author chose an angel as the

[106] David H. Aaron, "Genealogy of a Motif," 2012; notes from a lecture given by Dr. Aaron, September 2 and 30, 2015 at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati.
[107] David H. Aaron, "Motif Adaptation," accessed April 2, 2019, https://dhaaroncourses.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/motif-adaptation.pdf.
[108] Ibid.

unidentified individual (element 1), a grappling brawl as the challenge (element 2), and Jacob's new name, Israel, as the prize (element 4) for Jacob's persistence. The physical violence, then, constitutes a means towards a rewarding end.

Nourishing Violence

Violence enables people to obtain sources of nutrition. Thus, Israelites could kill permitted animals and birds and subsequently eat them if they drained and buried the creatures' blood (Lev. 17:13). Amongst its many other functions, the Temple cult ensured that the administrating priests enjoyed a consistent supply of food. The Bible's six depictions of cannibalism offer more disturbing examples of nourishing violence.[109] When King Ben-hadad's besiegement of Samaria creates a famine, for example, two mothers enter into an agreement to eat their sons on separate days, but only one fulfills her side of the arrangement. As a result, that woman tells the king, "[29]'[W]e cooked my son and we ate him. The next day I said to her [the other mother], "Give up your son and let's eat him"; but she hid her son.' [30]When the king heard what the woman said, he rent his clothes; and as he walked along the wall, the people could see that he was wearing sackcloth underneath" (2 Kgs. 6:26-29).[110]

Violence

2 Samuel 13 contains one of four instances of rape in the Hebrew Bible. In this story, Amnon, son of David, becomes infatuated with his half-sister Tamar. In fact, "Amnon was so distressed because of…Tamar that he became sick; for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her" (2 Sam. 13:2). According to Phyllis Trible, Tamar's

[109] See Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:53-57; 2 Kgs. 6:26-29; Jer. 19:9; Ezek. 5:10; and Lam. 4:10.
[110] For a horrific and tragic real-life case of nourishing cannibalism, see Nathaniel Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

virgin status renders her "protected property, inaccessible to males, including her brother."[111] Accordingly, a cousin by the name of Jonadab devises a plan to isolate Tamar in Amnon's bedroom. Amnon executes the plan perfectly (2 Sam. 13:3-14). Despite Tamar's pleading protestations, "he would not listen to her; he overpowered her and lay with her by force" (2 Sam. 13:14). After raping Tamar, Amnon's passion abates. The unconscionable sexual violence done to Tamar satiates Amnon's desire; it provides satisfaction.

Vengeful Violence

Addressing the Israelites in Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of Amalek—"[18]how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. [19]Therefore, when YHWH your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that YHWH your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!" (Deut. 25:18-19) By the time of Saul's kingship, when the Israelites enjoy the security that Moses foretold, the time for retribution has come. Through Samuel, the deity explicitly commands Saul to exterminate the Amalekites as "penalty for what Amalek did to Israel, for the assault he made upon them [the Israelites] on the road, on their way up from Egypt" (1 Sam. 15:2). Through genocidal violence, God wreaks vengeance on the Amalekites—albeit an imperfect vengeance since Saul "spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the second-born, the lambs, and all else that was of value" (1 Sam. 15:9).[112]

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[111] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 38. Similarly see Peter R. Ackroyd, *The Second Book of Samuel*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 121; Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downer's Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 264.

[112] For a discussion of the sacrificial characteristics in this story, see Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 61-62.

Humiliating Violence

To humiliate another human being constitutes an act of psychological violence because it destroys. As Wayne Koestenbaum eloquently writes, "Humiliation is a process of evacuation or depletion. The Greek word *askesis* nobly (if obliquely) implies this rigorous exercise of winnowing away, this shredding and disappearance. Supposedly, energy (the alias of matter) can't be destroyed. But humiliation represents *the destruction of matter*. Something once present—an intactness, a solidity, a substantiality—turns into tatters."[113] Walter J. Torres and Raymond M. Bergner show that humiliation demolishes status, "certain social positions vis-à-vis…other persons,"[114] more than anything else.

In the Bible, humiliating violence transpires primarily during and immediately after war. In 2 Kings 25, for example, the triumphant Chaldeans blind the defeated King Zedekiah of Judah after having forced him to watch as "[t]hey slaughtered his sons" (2 Kgs. 25:7). "Although no explicit idioms of humiliation are used in this particular narrative," Saul M. Olyan notes, "blindness imposed by an enemy is directly linked to reproach (חרפה) in 1 Sam 11:2."[115] There, while Nahash the Ammonite attacks Jabesh-gilead, the city's inhabitants try to strike a deal with their besieger: "[1]'Make a pact with us, and we will serve you.' [2]But Nahash the Ammonite answered them, 'I will make a pact with you on this condition, that everyone's right eye be gouged out; I will make this a humiliation for all Israel'" (1 Sam. 11:1-2). Despite scholarly disagreement over these verses,[116] one aspect is clear for Olyan. "Blindness imposed on an

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[113] Wayne Koestenbaum, *Humiliation*, BISB (New York: Picador, 2011), 10-11.
[114] Walter J. Torres and Raymond M. Bergner, "Humiliation: Its Nature and Consequences," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 38, no. 2 (2010): 197.
[115] Saul M. Olyan, "Theorizing Circumstantially Dependent Rites in and out of War Contexts," in *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritchel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright, AIIL 18, 16 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014).
[116] For example, Jabesh-gilead "was probably located along the Wadi Yâbis, although no one site has yet been conclusively identified." David Merling, in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C.

enemy is linked directly to shame."[117] By blinding a defeated foe, one inflicts humiliating violence through an act of gross violence.

Mustering Violence

Once King Saul hears word of the Israelites' predicament under Nahash, "He took a yoke of oxen and cut them into pieces, which he sent by messengers throughout the territory of Israel, with the warning, 'Thus shall be done to the cattle of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel into battle!' Terror from YHWH fell upon the people, and they came out as one man" (1 Sam. 11:7). The verse explicitly explains that the violence done to the cattle symbolizes the violence that the people will suffer should they refuse to join Saul's army. Terrified, they flock to his aid. Saul enlists ritual violence to muster soldiers and raise an army. Functionally, then, I thus refer to this violence as mustering violence.

Disaffiliating Violence

Ritual violence can also signify the political relationship between persons and peoples as in 2 Samuel 20, for example. The end of the preceding biblical chapter describes how the Israelites became outraged since the Judahites alone enjoyed the privilege of escorting David

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Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), s. v. "Jabesh Gilead." If Merling is correct, then, Jabesh-gilead would have been east of the Jordan River yet north of where the Gadites and Reubenites would have lived. *NOABNRSV*, 415. How, then, does blinding the right eyes of Jabash-gilead's presumably non-Israelite residents humiliate the Israelites? Numerous scholars argues that a passage in 4QSam^{a} clarifies the matter since it provides a passage absent from the Masoretic Text. The lemma reads: "Now Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had been grievously oppressing the Gadites and the Reubenites. He would gouge out the right eye of each of them and would not grant Israel a deliverer. No one was left of the Israelites across the Jordan whose right eye Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had not gouged out. But there were seven thousand men who had escaped from the Ammonites and had entered Jabesh-gilead." Translated by Emanuel Tov in his "Reflections on the Many Forms of Hebrew Scripture in Light of the LXX and 4QReworked Pentateuch," in *From Qumran to Aleppo: A Discussion with Emanuel Tov about the Textual History of Jewish Scriptures in Honor of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Armin Lange, Matthias Weigold, and József Zsengellér (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 14, n. 7. Yet, as Tov writes, "Not all scholars agree to this procedure, since some claim that the Qumran paragraph is not original but represents a late Midrash." Ibid., 14. Tov cites Alexander Rofé, "The Acts of Nahash according to 4QSam^{a}," *Israel Exploration Journal* 32 (1982): 129-133.

[117] Saul M. Olyan, "The Instrumental Dimensions of Ritual Violence against Corpses in Biblical Texts," in *Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible: New Perspectives*, ed. Saul M. Olyan, 133, n. 13 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

back to Jerusalem. Declaring that the Israelites have no allegiance to David, a Benjaminite by the name of Sheba son of Bichri therefore starts a revolt in chapter 20. At David's orders, a Judahite army pursues Sheba to Abel of Bet-maacah and besieges that city. When a woman offers to behead Sheba to save the town, Joab, the leader of the Judahite army agrees, and the residents of Abel successfully execute her plan: "they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bichri and threw it down to Joab. He then sounded the horn; all the men dispersed to their homes, and Joab returned to the king in Jerusalem" (2 Sam. 20:22). According to Olyan, the violence done to Sheba and the delivery of his head to the Judahites both disaffiliates the people of Abel from Sheba since it "terminate[s] an established political relationship [with him] and generate[s] a new affiliation [with King David]."[118] Olyan lists similar examples (e.g. 2 Sam. 4:1-12; 2 Kgs. 10:7) where violence also cuts political ties with one party and creates new bonds with another.[119]

Ritually Transformative Violence

In the Bible, one may resort to violence to transform the ritual status of oneself or other people. Violence functions this way most often in contexts of mourning as in 2 Samuel 10. When Hanun succeeds his father, Nahash, as king of Ammon, David sends courtiers to give his condolences since he enjoyed good relations with the deceased ruler. Unfortunately, the Ammonite officials lead Hanun to believe that "'[3]David has sent his courtiers…to explore and spy out the city, and to overthrow it.' [4]So Hanun seized David's courtiers, clipped off one side of their beards and cut away half of their garments at the buttocks, and sent them off. [5]When David was told of it, he dispatched men to meet them, for the men were greatly embarrassed. And the

[118] Olyan, "The Instrumental Dimensions of Ritual Violence," 131.
[119] Olyan further observes that "attempts to mitigate the baleful effects of ritual violence against corpses by an enemy might function to confirm extant political ties, as the actions of the Jabesh-Gileadites, who rescue the corpses of Saul and his sons from the wall of Bet Shean and bury them, illustrate (1 Sam. 31:8-13)." Ibid.

king gave orders: 'Stop in Jericho until your beards grow back; then you can return'" (2 Sam. 10:3-5). In addition to shaming David's courtiers, the

> [c]oerced asymmetrical shaving of the beard and forced exposure of the genital area of the body…parody normal mourning rites such as hair and beard manipulation through shaving and depilation, and forms of nudity, which in all cases are undertaken by the mourner himself or herself, not imposed by force by another person. …[T]hese coercive acts change the ritual status of David's emissaries (and by extension, David himself), effectively turning an embassy of mourning allies (the comforters) and the ruler whom they represent into nonmourning enemies.[120]

Cultic Violence

The sacrificial cult involved a great deal of violence, for the עֹלָה, זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים, חַטָּאת, and אָשָׁם require the butchering of animals. Although each of these offerings have distinct yet oft overlapping functions, the method of slaughtering remains the same in the first three cases. First, the provider of the offering brings the animal to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (Lev. 1:3; 3:2, 4; 4:4). Second, either the provider or the priest lays one or two hands on the creature's head (Lev. 1:4, 3:3; 4:4), and slaughters it (Lev. 1:5, 3:2; 4:4). The אָשָׁם constitutes the exception, for here the provider brings the offering directly to the priest to make expiation on his/her behalf (Lev. 5:6, 8, 11, 16, 18, 25-26). For this reason, it appears that the violence done to the animal(s) always has the same purpose: it facilitates the sacrificial cult and relationship with the deity.

[120] Saul M. Olyan, "Theorizing Violence in Biblical Ritual Contexts: The Case of Mourning Rites," in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Saul M. Olyan, 173-174 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012).

CHAPTER THREE

PSALM 106: A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Introduction

The previous chapter examined how violence functions in different ways throughout the Hebrew Bible. This chapter continues that task with one exception: the focus on a single, extended unit of biblical material, Psalm 106. The largest and most significant portion of this poem recalls the Israelites' disobedience, faithlessness, and waywardness from the period of the Egyptian sojourn to that of the Babylonian exile. Violence pervades the preponderance of this section, which recounts the wilderness sojourn, specifically eight accounts of rebellion. David H. Aaron lists them as

> (1) the rebellion at the Sea of Reeds; (2) the complaint for food in the wilderness; (3) the revolt of Dathan and Abiram; (4) the Golden Calf at Horeb; (5) rejection of the promised land; (6) acceptance of Baal-Peor and assimilation into local pagan culture (resulting in Phineas' slaughter of Zimri and Cozbi); (7) the waters of Meribah; (8) a general complaint against assimilation.[121]

This particular sequence of events does not correspond with the order in which they appear in the Torah.[122] Although "it is rather clear that the author of this poem knew many of the narratives that would eventually be conveyed in the Pentateuch," writes Aaron, it seems that the psalmist drew from versions of the stories different than those preserved in the Pentateuch today.[123] These dissimilarities matter because they influence the psalmist's depiction of violence, which exhibits appreciation for violence's functional complexities. I argue, then, that the psalmist himself discerned that biblical violence serves a plurality of ends. However, the psalm does not always

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[121] David H. *Etched in Stone: The Emergence of the Decalogue* (New York and London: T & T Clark, 2006), 79.
[122] Ibid., 78.
[123] Ibid., 78-79.

reflect this discernment when compared to the corresponding Pentateuchal episodes. In these cases, the poet either fails to perceive these distinctions, simply omits them, or has no cognizance of them because he had a different version of the narrative. In this chapter, I do not examine Psalm 106:16-18 where the poet recounts a different version of the rebellions in Numbers 16.[124] I analyze that section of the psalm in the next chapter of this thesis where I discuss the Korah and the Dathan and Abiram episodes.

Converting and Redemptive Violence (Ps. 106:8-12; Ex. 14-15)

Psalm 106 first recalls the Israelites' complaint at the Sea of Reeds. With Pharaoh and his army quickly approaching, the Israelites, fearful for their lives, complain to Moses for bringing them to die in the wilderness rather than permitting them to remain in Egypt where they would have at least continued to live (Ex. 14:10-13). "Our forefathers in Egypt did not perceive Your wonders," says the psalmist, "they did not remember Your abundant love, but rebelled at the sea, at the Sea of Reeds" (Ps. 106:7).[125] They rebelled, according to Amos Ḥakham, "for they did not believe that God would have the power to part the waters for them."[126] "Yet," instead of punishing the Israelites' waywardness,

> [8]He [God] saved them, as befits His name, to make known His might.
> [9]He sent His blast against the Sea of Reeds; it became dry; He led them through the deep as through a wilderness.
> [10]He delivered them from the foe, redeemed them from the enemy.
> [11]Water covered their adversaries; not one of them was left.
> [12]Then they believed His promise, and sang His praises. [Ps. 106:8-12]

Had the deity punished the Israelites at the Sea of Reeds, God would not have made known God's power to the Egyptians who would have likely misconstrued that punishment as proof of

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[124] Ibid., 79.
[125] Unless noted otherwise, all biblical translations follow The Jewish Publication Society's translation (1999).
[126] Amos Ḥakham, *Psalms 101-150*, trans. Israel Berman et al., vol. 3 of *The Bible: Psalms with The Jerusalem Commentary*, The Koschitzky ed. (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003), 78.

God's impotence or even absence. Instead, God punishes the Egyptians in a miraculous manner to demonstrate the extent of divine power just as the deity had intended (Ex. 14:4). Nowhere else does God split the waters only to have them crashing down, drowning an entire army. The incident unfolds like a play. The Egyptians perform the role of the enemy, God the divine redeemer, and the Israelites the redeemed who behold their oppressors' final demise: "And when Israel *saw* the wondrous power which YHWH had wielded against the Egyptians, the people *feared* YHWH; they *had faith* in YHWH and His servant Moses" (Ex. 14:31),[127] or as Psalm 106:12, alluding to the previous verse,[128] says, "Then they believed His promise, and sang His praises." Seeing God's terrifying powers of redemption, the Israelites come to believe in God. Seeing is believing. Instead of punishing the Israelites for their initial faithlessness, God exploits their endangerment as an opportunity to provide them a visceral reason to believe. Ironically, then, by drowning the Egyptians, God not only redeems the Israelites but also transforms their disbelief into belief.

Since the Sea of Reeds separates Egypt from the wilderness, it constitutes a liminal space and therefore no precise place at all. Although technically not part of the wilderness, then, the body of water nevertheless has some of that barren land's characteristics on account of its liminality. More significantly, it facilitates and, in fact, participates in the miraculous violence wrought there, for God kills the Egyptians through the subversion of water's life-giving powers to deal death instead. According to the psalmist, the wilderness and its immediate environs embody a place of rebellion where God exploits the natural world through extraordinary violence to convert unbelieving Israelites into believers.

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[127] Emphasis added.
[128] Ḥakham, *Psalms 101-150*, 80.

Although properly discerning the converting function of violence in Exodus 14, the psalmist nonetheless misses, or simply omits a second, and perhaps more important, function of this violence. God drowns the Egyptians to *redeem* the Israelites from slavery (Ex. 15:13), and to redeem does not merely mean to liberate—that is, "[t]o set free (someone or something confined or in servitude)"[129]—or to save, "to make safe."[130] To redeem, לִגאוֹל, means "to claim for oneself."[131] God enlists violence to redeem the Israelites from slavery *not* to set them free but to claim them for Godself. No longer ruled by the Egyptians, the Israelites become subject to God, their Redeemer.

Punishing Violence (Ps. 106:13-15)

No sooner did the Israelites believe in God and remember God's wonders than did they forget them:

> [13]But they soon forgot His deeds; they would not wait to learn His plan.
> [14]They were seized with craving in the wilderness, and put God to the test in the wasteland.
> [15]He gave them what they asked for, then made them waste away [וַיִּשְׁלַח רָזׇון בְּנַפְשָׁם]. [Ps. 106:13-15]

Previously, God unleashed violence on the Egyptians to transform Israelite disbelief into belief. Now that the Israelites, having forgotten the violent wonders that God wrought, no longer trust in the deity's power to perform miracles, God resorts to violence once more but with one purpose in mind: to punish them for their unfaithfulness. God, as the psalmist sees it, will make no further attempt to convince fickle, faithless people in God's miraculous power. The deity will simply punish them with death instead.

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[129] *OED Online*, s.v. "liberate," accessed April 21, 2019, http://www.oed.com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/view/Entry/107875?rskey=oQsaVE&result=3&isAdvanced=false#eid.
[130] *OED Online*, s.v. "save," accessed April 21, 2019, http://www.oed.com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/view/Entry/107875?rskey=oQsaVE&result=3&isAdvanced=false#eid.
[131] *HALOT*, s.v. "גאל."

Although these verses make no mention of survivors, surely some Israelites do endure. Otherwise, the psalm would end here since the Israelites would have never reached the Land of Israel. Why some as opposed to others survived, the psalm does not say. But the brutality of the violence seems certain although the all too common grievance for sustenance makes it impossible to identify the precise complaint and Pentateuchal episode to which these verses refer.[132] Ḥakham argues that the imagery of wasting away draws from Numbers 11 where, for the Israelites' incessant cries for meat, God punishes them with an excess of meat and "a very severe plague" (Num. 11:19-20, 33). According to Ḥakham, then, "The psalmist calls this blow 'leanness' in order to suggest that even though God fulfilled the people's request, the results were the opposite of what they had wanted, for they had wanted to fatten themselves by eating the quail, but their eating led to leanness,"[133] specifically "רָזוֹן" (Ps. 106:15), "emaciation."[134] This choice of punishment capitalizes on the desolate land in which the people must wander for forty years. The wasteland facilitates starvation precisely because of its barrenness, and this desolateness foregrounds the victims. Enhancing their visibility, it brings them into focus. The wilderness publicizes the body as it suffers starvation. A particularly "intimate" form of violence since it constitutes an internal process,[135] this punishment renders the body both victim and perpetrator, for the starving body eats itself from the inside out. Consuming fat and muscle from within, the body simultaneously displays its victimhood from without with sunken eyes, swollen bellies, and hanging flesh. The body itself becomes a spectacle of violence to all, to those who, fortunate not to waste away, witness other bodies withering away and to the starving who behold

[132] For similar complaints, see Exodus 15-17 and Numbers 20-21.
[133] Ḥakham, *Psalms 101-150*, 81-82.
[134] *HALOT*, s.v. "רָזוֹן."
[135] The word, "intimate," comes from Laura E. Tanner, *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

their own emaciated bodies and those around them. Inscribed with the markings of divine fury, the body becomes a text that is itself direct testimony to and an unequivocal embodiment of God's miraculous power.

Punishing and Ordering Violence (Ps. 106:19-23; Ex. 32)

Next, the psalmist recalls the incident of the golden calf at Mount Horeb. Fearful of what had befallen Moses who had yet to descend from the mountaintop, the Israelites spurn God once again:

> [19]They made a calf at Horeb and bowed down to a molten image.
> [20]They exchanged their glory for the image of a bull that feeds on grass.
> [21]They forgot God who saved them, who performed great deeds in Egypt,
> [22]wondrous deeds in the land of Ham, awesome deeds at the Sea of Reeds.
> [23]He would have destroyed them had not Moses His chosen one confronted Him in the breach to avert His destructive wrath. [Ps. 106:19-23]

According to the above verses, the Israelites replaced God, here called "their glory" (v. 20),[136] with a golden calf as their deity.[137] In the psalmist's interpretation, his ancestors practiced idolatry because "[20][t]hey forgot" that God redeemed them from Egypt through "[21]great…[22]wondrous… awesome deeds" (Ps. 106:21-22), meaning the plagues and the drowning of the Egyptians.[138] How ironic, then, that the Israelites turn to idolatry because they forgot the very violence that God wreaked to cultivate their loyalty and to magnify the divine name.[139] Violence failed; it did not perform its function. Yet, rather than question its efficacy,

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[136] Berlin and Brettler, commentary on Psalm 106:20, in *JSB*, 1402; Ḥakham, *Psalms 101-150*, 83.
[137] On the phrase, "that feeds on grass" (Ps 106:20), Ḥakham comments, "The psalmist adds this in order further to denigrate the people who had worshipped the golden calf: They accepted as a god the likeness of a grass-eating ox, imagining that it would eat their sacrifices." *Psalms 101-150*, 83.
[138] See Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, rev. ed., Word Biblical Commentary 21 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 54.
[139] "The forgetting of God introduces a striking reference, in vv. 21-22, back to the beginning of the history in vv. 7-12." Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101-150*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 89-90.

God chooses violence again and, without Moses, would have murdered the idolaters. It bears emphasis that the psalmist characterizes Moses' intervention in military terms. As Ḥakham writes, "The psalmist likens the sin involving the golden calf to a breach in the wall that protects Israel, and he describes Moses as standing in the breach like a mighty warrior, who does not allow the enemy (God's wrath) to penetrate the breach."[140] The Israelites do not suffer divine violence thanks to Moses who himself has to engage in battle to stay God's fury. It seems that the deity has mercy only for "Moses His chosen one" (v. 23).

The psalmist's version of events gives the impression that the Israelites did not suffer any punishment. On the contrary, Exodus 32 shows that many did indeed. Yes, Moses successfully persuades God not to destroy the people for their idolatry (Ex. 32:7-14); however, once he descends from the mountain, "[20][h]e took the calf that they had made and burned it; he ground it to powder and strewed it upon the water and so made the Israelites drink it. …[35]Then YHWH sent a plague upon the people, for what they did with the calf that Aaron made" (Ex. 32:20, 35).[141] Once again, God punishes the faithless with death.

Yet, Exodus 32 contains more than just punishing violence, for after destroying the Golden Calf, "Moses saw that the people were out of control—since Aaron had let them get out of control—so that they were a menace to any who might oppose them" (Ex. 32:25). According to Sarna, "The destruction of the golden calf seems to have triggered a riot among its worshipers."[142] Moses thus instructs Levites to "[27]'put sword on thigh, go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay brother, neighbor, and kin.' [28]The Levites did as

[140] Ḥakham, *Psalms 101-150*, 84.
[141] In placing verse 35 after verse 20, I follow Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 210.
[142] Ibid., 208.

Moses had bidden; and some three thousand of the people fell that day" (Ex. 32:27-28). The Levites function as "peacekeepers," ironically killing to quell chaos. Violence, then, reestablishes order in two senses.[143] It not only puts an end to pandemonium but also restores ideological order. With the aberrant idolaters killed, belief in God becomes the norm instead of the exception.[144]

"Uncovenanting" Violence (Ps. 106:24-27)

Psalm 106:24-27 recalls the incident of the spies in Numbers 13-14. Following the spies' report of Canaan's occupation by Nephilim who render that land unassailable, the Israelites "[2]railed against Moses and Aaron…[3]'Why is YHWH taking us to that land to fall by the sword?'" Preferring death in Egypt over death in Canaan, "they said to one another, 'Let us head back for Egypt'" (Num. 14:2-4). As the psalmist puts it:

> [24]They rejected the desirable land, and put no faith in His promise.
> [25]They grumbled in their tents and disobeyed YHWH.
> [26]So He raised His hand in oath to make them fall in the wilderness,
> [27]to disperse their offspring among the nations and scatter them through the lands.
> [Ps. 106:24-27]

According to Ḥakham, the psalmist interprets the Israelites' rejection of the land as disbelief that God "would help them conquer the land."[145] Following Numbers 14:22 and the retelling of the incident of the spies in Deuteronomy 1:27,[146] the poet also casts the Israelites' complaint and unwillingness to enter the Promised Land as disobedience. Accordingly, God inflicts two

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[143] According to Sarna, "The Levites are called in to suppress it [the rebellion] *and* to punish the guilty ones." Ibid. Emphasis added.
[144] Presumably, every idolater perished but with the astounding exception of Aaron, the architect of Golden Calf incident, who emerges completely unharmed! For an explanation of this seemingly inexplicable fact, see Aaron, *Etched in Stone*, 262.
[145] According to Ḥakham, Psalm 106:24 alludes to Deuteronomy 1:32 and "the faith that they [the Israelites] had acquired after the parting of the Red Sea." Ibid., 85. However, Numbers 14:11, as Hossfeld and Zenger note, also speaks of "a lack of faith in YHWH's word." Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 90.
[146] Ḥakham, *Psalms 101-150*, 85; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 90.

punishments. Save for Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14:30), the current generation of Israelites will perish in the wilderness, and their descendants, who will enter the Land of Israel, will go into exile. Whereas Numbers 14 mentions only the first punishment, Ezekiel 20 includes the former and the latter. It seems, then, that the psalmist either quotes Ezekiel 20 or the textual tradition that informs that chapter.[147] Although the manner in which the Israelites perish in the wilderness remains uncertain, they seem destined for deaths of violence such as that in Numbers 14:32-33: "[32]'your [the Israelites'] carcasses shall drop in this wilderness, [33]while your children roam the wilderness for forty years, suffering for your faithlessness, until the last of your carcasses is down in the wilderness.'"

Although God does punish the guilty, an entire generation of innocent, unborn Israelites will suffer violence as well, a point that the psalmist emphasizes with the words, "their offspring" (Ps. 106:27). The corporate character of this violence functionally distinguishes it from punishing violence that targets only the culpable. According to Joel S. Kaminsky, "the notion of covenant…maintains a corporate understanding of reward and punishment."[148] In this episode, then, it seems that a large number of Israelites actually break the covenant with God because they reject the land divinely promised and entrusted to them as part of that contract. As a result, in this instance, they not only renege on their responsibilities to the deity but also release God from God's obligation to protect them as well. Following Kaminsky, all of Israel, both alive and unborn, transgresses, and the divine violence done to them marks them as transgressors. It does not merely punish them; it affirms, for this generation and the one yet to come, that the

[147] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 90.
[148] Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup. 196 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 12.

Israelites temporarily became uncovenanted, temporarily because God's "steadfast love is eternal" (Ps. 106:1), according to the psalmist.

More Punishing Violence and the Conclusion of Psalm 106 (Ps. 106:28-47)

Having already explored punishing violence, which constitutes the remaining violence recounted in Psalm 106, I will simply summarize the rest of this poem. In the tale just examined, God decides to destroy the generation of Israelites that reject the Land of Israel; now, the psalmist recounts the occasion on which God actually slaughters all of the condemned Israelites except for Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb.[149] Summarizing Numbers 25, Psalm 106:28-31 reads:

> [28]They attached themselves to Baal Peor, ate sacrifices offered to the dead.
> [29]They provoked anger by their deeds, and a plague broke out among them.
> [30]Phinehas stepped forth and intervened, and the plague ceased.
> [31]It was reckoned to his merit for all generations, to eternity.

Like Numbers 25:3, Psalm 106:28 construes the Israelites' worship of Baal-peor as attachment;[150] yet, here, the psalmist also designates that Moabite deity as a "dead god."[151] For their idolatry, the Israelites incur God's "wrath" in the form of a plague that,[152] were it not for Phineas' violent intervention, would have killed more than twenty-four thousand Israelites (Num. 25:9).

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[149] Nili S. Fox, commentary on Numbers 25:9, in *JSB*, 335. See Numbers 26:64-65. See also Aaron, *Etched in Stone*, 219.
[150] It may also refer to their cohabitation with Moabite women as well. Ḥakham, *Psalms 101-150*, 86.
[151] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 90; see similarly Ḥakham, *Psalms 101-150*, 86.
[152] Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 213.

The seventh complaint scene in the psalm displays cognizance of Numbers 20 where the Israelites wail about their thirst.[153] After Moses strikes the rock once more than commanded to produce water for the cantankerous people, God decrees that he shall never set foot in the Promised Land. As Psalm 106:32-33 reads:

> [32]They provoked wrath at the waters of Meribah and Moses suffered on their account,
> [33]because they rebelled against Him and he spoke rashly.

According to the psalmist and in contrast to Numbers 20, Moses suffers on account of not only his own disobedience but also the Israelites, for their griping drives him to hit the rock twice instead of once as the deity had commanded him. In any case, Numbers 20 explains why Moses never entered the Land of Israel; he dies in the wilderness.[154] He does not suffer in a spectacular or even violent way at all, for such punishment would subvert his legitimacy as the divinely appointed prophet and lawgiver. The penalty that Moses does pay foreshadows the exile that God will inflict upon the Israelites after they enter the Land of Israel: God denies him entry there and will expel the Israelites from that land through exile.

Indeed, the remaining verses in Psalm 106 demonstrate this point. For the Israelites' failure to "destroy the nations [in the Land of Israel]" (v. 34) and their engagement in idolatrous practices like child sacrifice (vv. 35-38),

> [41]He [God] handed them over to the nations; their foes ruled them.
> [42]Their enemies oppressed them and they were subject to their power. [Ps. 106:41-42]

Put simply, God punishes the Israelites by exiling them to foreign nations. Although "He [God] saved them time and again," they continued to rebel, "and so they were brought low by their

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[153] Aaron, *Etched in Stone*, 77.
[154] Ibid., 208.

iniquity" (v. 43). Ultimately, God "kindly made all their [the Israelites'] captors kindly disposed toward them" (v. 46) not because the Israelites repented or ceased their rebellious ways but because "He was mindful of His covenant and in His great faithfulness relented" (v. 45). According to Berlin and Brettler, this turn from divine punishment to forgiveness

> shows how forbearing and forgiving God has been throughout the past, and, by implication, how forgiving He will continue to be, since He maintains His covenant and is merciful (vv. 43-45). …The exile of 586 BCE, says the psalmist, is no different from earlier punishments, after which God took Israel back into His favor.[155]

This faith undergirds the penultimate verse, a collective petition that God redeem the Israelites from exile and return them to the Land of Israel (v. 47). The psalm then closes with praise of God (v. 48).

Conclusion

My analysis of Psalm 106 reveals that, on the one hand, the psalmist distinguished among diverse types of biblical violence based on function. On the other hand, discrepancies between the accounts of violence in the poem and those in the Torah suggest that the poet also possibly missed some differences, elides them, or knew not about them for some reason. Psalm 106:12 explicitly captures the converting function of the drowning of the Egyptians; however, the poet does not mention that this violence has a redemptive aspect as well. His depiction of divinely caused starvation clearly reflects appreciation of this violence's punishing purpose. Yet, his account of the Golden Calf incident shows no cognizance of the punishing and ordering violence that befell the idolaters. Finally, the poet's retelling of Numbers 25 exhibits a nuanced discernment of the "uncovenanting" function of the violence that afflicts not only the generation of Israelites who rejected the Land of Israel but also Israelites in the future. Having explored

[155] Berlin and Brettler, commentary on Psalm 106, in *JSB*, 1401.

some of violence's different functions in the Bible, I will now develop an ethics of reading biblical violence. In the next chapter, I begin this task with Numbers 16.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPECTACULAR VIOLENCE IN THE WILDERNESS: THE FIERY CONSUMPTION OF KORAH, THE EARTHLY DEVOURMENT OF DATHAN AND ABIRAM, AND THE EXILE OF THE ETHICAL FROM THE POLITICAL

> Let the earth tell you for she opened her mouth when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against God. Let the buried cities of Nineveh, and the tattered relics of Tyre and Sidon, tell you that God is just, and will by no means spare the guilty. — C. H. Spurgeon[156]

Introduction

In 586 BCE, King Nebuchadnezzar II exiled much of the Judean population to Babylonia.[157] Despite their displacement, religious and secular authorities continued to lead the Judean exiles in some capacity to preserve their identity,[158] but, as time passed, problems arose. First, in light of their covenant with God, Judeans came to question why they remained in exile.[159] Second, other theological problems developed as some members of the community began to assimilate to Babylonian culture. David H. Aaron argues that biblical writers addressed the former issue by adapting "proto-forms of the Wilderness Narratives."[160] For example, in Numbers 13-14, God destines a generation of Israelites to die in the wilderness because they do not believe that that deity would protect them from the Nephilim whom they would have to

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[156] C. H. Spurgeon, "Justice Satisfied," (sermon, delivered, Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens, London, England, May 29, 1859), in C. H. Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit, Containing Sermons*, vol. 3 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1894), 241.

[157] Lester L. Grabbe writes, "When Jerusalem fell in 587/586, many of the population were taken captive to Babylonia, but recent studies indicate that the bulk of the population (though considerably reduced because of fighting and other events) remained in Palestine." *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*, vol. 1, *Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 353.

[158] Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B. C. E.*, trans. David Green (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 100; Rainer Albertz, "More and Less Than a Myth: Reality and Significance of Exile for the Political, Social, and Religious History of Judah," in *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of the Exile*, ed. John J. Ahn and Jill Middlemas, 20-33 (New York: T & T Clark, 2012). See similarly Peter Ross Bedford, *Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 48.

[159] Aaron, *Etched in Stone*, 188-189.

[160] Ibid., 214; David H. Aaron, "Imagining the Literary Development of the Wilderness Narratives," (lecture handout, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH, n.d.).

defeat to conquer the Land of Israel. That story functions allegorically. To "a postexilic community that cannot understand the delayed reestablishment of the people in its homeland,"[161] Aaron explains, Numbers 13-14 says, "The elders will die off, but there is still hope for the children."[162] According to Aaron, this solution to the first challenge created an opportunity to address the second problem:

> [B]y creating the faithlessness at Paran [in Numbers 13-14] such that the people incurred the punishment of death in the desert, the authors opened up an entirely new set of literary possibilities that had not previously existed. This gave them the opportunity to insert these various complaint and apostasy scenes, each of which was adjusted to have relevance to some concern contemporaneous with the author's own generation.[163]

These complaint episodes, which the biblical writers often utilize to manage threats to Israelite identity, frequently feature the use of violence, especially of a *spectacular* kind. I use spectacle in the Foucauldian sense of the word.[164] By *spectacular violence*, then, I mean *the public performance and execution of "political operation[s]" through acts of violence, which possess high "visible intensity."*[165] What is the function of spectacular violence, and how does it relate to the wilderness? To answer this question, I will begin by discussing Hannah Arendt's insight regarding the antipodal relationship between violence and power. I will then analyze Psalm 106, for it offers insight into an early conception of the wilderness and the role of spectacular violence.[166] Next, I will proceed to examine Numbers 16-17:5, for it contains some of the most

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[161] Aaron, *Etched in Stone*, 214.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid., 219.
[164] Despite never offering a lucid definition of that term, Michel Foucault does explore different characteristics of spectacle in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). I highlight the most prominent features in my definition of spectacle.
[165] The quoted expressions come from Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 9, 53. Emphasis added. On the performative and public aspect of spectacle, see also ibid., 12, 50, 57.
[166] Psalm 106:47 suggests an exilic or postexilic context for the composition of the psalm. See Aaron, *Etched in Stone*, 79; Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, commentary on Psalm 106, in *JSB*, 1401.

striking instances of spectacular violence with the incineration of Korah by divine fire and the earth's consumption of Dathan and Abiram. Why do these two extraordinary punishments occur in the wilderness, and what purpose do they serve?

My thesis is twofold. First, since "political operation[s]" necessarily involve the exercise of power per Foucault, [167] I argue that spectacular violence functions not only to reestablish a threatened authority figure's power but also to deter such threats. Since biblical writers composed complaint episodes to address threats to priestly and secular authorities who worked to preserve Israelite identity, they utilized spectacular violence in the wilderness narrative to reassert those leaders' power. Indeed, the violence used often capitalizes on the geography of the wilderness itself. This point leads to my second claim. The incineration of Korah and the earth's consumption of Dathan and Abiram transpires in the wilderness because that land's geographical features foster and even accentuate these spectacles. By solidifying Aaron's and Moses' leadership, the spectacular violence in Numbers 16-17:5 functions allegorically to entrench priestly and secular leaders' power over the Judean exiles in an attempt to preserve their identity. As a result, these authority figures use their power for their own ends and thereby exile the ethical from the political.

Hannah Arendt on Violence as the Opposite of Power

In addition to her claim that violence constitutes a means to an end, Hannah Arendt also argues, "Power and violence are opposites."[168] For her, the former "corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to *act* in concert." [169] To understand what Arendt means by power therefore requires an appreciation for her distinctive conception of *action*, which she expounds in

[167] The quoted expression comes from Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 53.
[168] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 56.
[169] Ibid., 44. Emphasis added.

The Human Condition. In chapter 1, I mentioned how this book explores "the three fundamental human activities: labor, work, and action."[170] Labor designates the unending, natural activities in which all creatures engage to produce objects of consumption to support their life processes.[171] A uniquely human activity in which people make "objects for use" to create the human artifice,[172] work falls into the means-end category and, unlike labor, has "a definite beginning and a definite, predictable, end" point upon which the object of fabrication reaches completion.[173] According to Canovan, Arendt largely discusses labor and work to help "define," clarify, and concretize her concept of action.[174]

What, then, does action mean for Arendt? According to her, it "corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world."[175] Arendt uses *plurality* as a quasi-synonym for diversity,[176] quasi because plurality also implies "equality" among different individuals.[177] Moreover, since "[a]ction…[constitutes] the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter,"[178] action somehow binds people together or brings them into direct relationship with each other through communication. Speech therefore becomes of paramount importance.[179] Indeed, according to John Levi Martin, action for Arendt "is paradigmatically *speech*,"[180] and, as Paul

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[170] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 7.
[171] Ibid., 7, 100, 106, 110.
[172] Ibid., 136-137, 139.
[173] Ibid., 143-144, 305.
[174] Margaret Canovan, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 58.
[175] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.
[176] Dana R. Villa, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. Dana R. Villa, 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[177] Richard J. Bernstein, "Hannah Arendt's Reflections on Violence and Power," *IRIS: European Journal of Philosophy and Public Debate* 3, no. 5 (April 2011): 8.
[178] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.
[179] Ibid., 175ff.
[180] John Levi Martin, "*The Human Condition* and the Theory of Action," in *The Anthem Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr and Philip Walsh, Anthem Companions to Sociology 1, 55 (London: Anthem Press 2017).

Voice notes, "Some commentators wonder whether action and speech are the same thing for Arendt but the texts are ambiguous on this point."[181] I, for one, should like to take Arendt at her word with the understanding that action includes both speech and "deeds."[182] However, I agree with Martin that speech "is more fundamental than" deed for Arendt.[183] Either through speech or deed, then, "actors make an attempt to solve a problem, make a speech, or act on a public matter."[184] With these ideas in mind, I requote Arendt's definition in *On Violence*: "*Power* corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to *act* in concert." [185] Power requires people working together.

> [P]ower comes into being only if and when men join themselves for the purpose of action…Hence, binding and promising, combining and covenanting, are the means by which power is kept in existence.[186]
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> Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is "in power" we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with (*potestas in populo*, without a people or group there is no power), disappears, "his power" also vanishes.[187]

In other words, power denotes the human capacity for a diverse community of individuals who enjoy equality to come together through speech and deed. Power emerges when people "step…forward from their private lives into the light of public affairs…tak[e] the initiative and

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[181] Paul Voice, "Labour, Work and Action," in *Hannah Arendt: Key Concepts*, ed. Patrick Hayden, Key Concepts, 45 (Oxon: Routledge, 2014).
[182] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178.
[183] Martin, "*The Human Condition* and the Theory of Action," 55.
[184] Karin A. Fry, *Arendt: A Guide for the Perplexed*, GP (London: Continuum, 2009), 45. I must stress that I have not only oversimplified but also neglected crucial elements of action, like its revelatory character (see Arendt, *The Human Condition*, chap. 5). I do not, then, provide a comprehensive explanation of action simply because this thesis does not require one. I only mention those characteristics of action that bear on this thesis.
[185] Arendt, *On Violence*, 44. Emphasis added.
[186] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), 175.
[187] Ibid.

start…things…embark…upon common enterprises and experience[e]…the exhilaration of freedom."[188]

Arendt once reflected, "I do not believe that there is any thought process possible without personal experience."[189] Accordingly, her encounter with antisemitism and German National Socialism indelibly influenced her thought. Claude LeFort explains, "Arendt's reading of totalitarianism in both its Nazi and Stalinist version governs the subsequent elaboration of her theory of politics. She conceptualizes politics by inverting the image of totalitarianism."[190] Her conception of power as contingent on the preexistence of togetherness, engagement with otherness, and equality in diversity therefore occupies a place of central importance in, and perhaps even defines, politics for her:

> Power is indeed of the essence of all government, but violence is not. Violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues. And what needs justification by something else cannot be the essence of anything. The end of war—end taken in its twofold meaning—is peace or victory; but to the question And what is the end of peace? There is no answer. Peace is an absolute…Power is in the same category: it is, as they say, "an end in itself." (This, of course, is not to deny that governments pursue policies and employ their power to achieve prescribed goals. But the power structure itself precedes and outlasts all aims, so that power, far from being the means to an end, is actually the very condition enabling a group of people to think and act in terms of the means-end category.)[191]

By definition, power cannot outdo its end because it has none; power is an end in and of itself. Violence, however, always runs the risk of overwhelming the end for which it is implemented. Violence, even when used for constructive ends, can become destructive; power is only constructive. Since power requires communication, collaboration, and cocreation, violence

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[188] Canovan, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, 58.
[189] Hannah Arendt, "'What Remains? The Language Remains': A Conversation with Günter Gaus," in *The Portable Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr, The Viking Portable Library, 19 (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).
[190] Claude Lefort, "Hannah Arendt and the Question of the Political," in Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), 50.
[191] Arendt, *On Violence*, 51.

contradicts it. As Richard J. Bernstein cogently explains, "Violence is essentially anti-political. It uses tools, weapons, and sophisticated technological devices to destroy power."[192] Arendt writes: "Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command resulting in instant and perfect obedience. What can never grow out of it is power. …Rule by sheer violence comes into play where power is being lost."[193] In Numbers 16-17:5, Moses and Aaron call on God to inflict spectacular violence for this very reason. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram challenge these leaders' positions of power because they question whether God ever empowered them in the first place.

The Korah and the Dathan and Abiram Episodes

Numbers 16-17:5 consists of at least two different tales of rebellion. One revolves around Korah and the other around the brothers Dathan and Abiram. Although both of these stories constitute distinct complaint scenes, the redactor eventually merged them.[194] This composite narrative often makes for difficult reading because it contains multiple inconsistences. Accordingly, I disentangle these stories from each other and present them side by side in the table at the end of this chapter.[195] However, even my reconstructions contain narrative gaps like the absence of transition scenes. For example, as the aforementioned table indicates, the Korah episode has no intervening scene between the "Refutation" and "The Plan for Defeating the Insurrection (The Miracle Set Up)." Both of these literary stations feature Moses as the *only*

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[192] Bernstein, *Why Read Hannah Arendt Now*, 98.
[193] Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 53.
[194] Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, AB 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 405-406; Aaron, *Etched in Stone*, 214. On the claim that three or four rebellions inform the narrative in its current form, see, for example, Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers*, 415.
Jaeyoung Jeon, "The Zadokites in the Wilderness: The Rebellion of Korach (Num 16) and the Zadokite Redaction," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 127, no. 3 (2015): 381–411, doi: https://doi.org/10.1515/zaw-2015-0021. Levine argues that the "priestly writers" introduced the Korah story into the Dathan and Abiram tale "to convert the context of the insurrection. Effectively this shift made of the incident an internecine struggle between the family of Aaron, the Amramite, and the family of Korah, the Izharite." *Numbers 1-20*, 406.
[195] This table heavily relies upon David H. Aaron, "Leadership Crisis."

speaker who, in both cases, directly addresses Korah. Why, then, does the narrator unnecessarily identify Moses as the speaker and Korah as the addressee in the second literary station when he had already done so in the first? A second difficulty surfaces when transitioning from Numbers 16:5-7 to Numbers 16:18. In Numbers 16:6-7, Moses instructs Korah and his followers to "'[6]take fire pans, [7]and tomorrow put fire in them and lay incense on them before YHWH;'" yet, verse 18, which immediately follows, then recounts Korah's heeding those instructions without indicating that that tomorrow had come. In short, this pericope provides no indication of the passage of time; it does not provide the necessary transition. Since the canonized, composite narrative in the Bible likewise lacks the desired transitions for either of these examples, the redactor likely omitted this material to facilitate the fusion of these stories.

The Korah Episode

The story of Korah, who rejects the Aaronides exclusive purview over the priesthood, begins after two editorial verses.[196] Numbers 16:3 reads, "They [Korah and the two hundred fifty chieftains] combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them, 'You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and YHWH is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above YHWH's congregation?'" According to Jacob Milgrom, the claim of the entire community's holiness "is a clever application of the command 'to be holy' at the end of the previous section (15:40)," dealing with commandment to wear ציתצת. "In effect," Milgrom explains, "Korah argues that if all of Israel aspires to holiness by wearing a priestly mixture in their garments…why should they not be eligible for the priesthood itself?"[197] Since the Korah story in no way pertains to the ציתצת or even mentions the fringes at all, it seems more likely that

[196] David H. Aaron (lecture, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH, November 15, 2018).
[197] Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 131.

that character's argument reflects a widespread idea in the Israelite *cultural repertoire*.[198] After all, as Terrence E. Fretheim notes, the notion "that *every one* is holy" recurs again in Deuteronomy 7:6.[199] Whatever the meaning of the words, "'all the community are holy'" (Num 16:3), Korah unquestionably challenges the priestly leadership.

In response, Moses falls on his face (Num 16:4), possibly in an act of appeal to God,[200] and refutes Korah:

> [8]Moses said to Korah, "Hear me, sons of Levi.[201] [9]Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has set you apart from the community of Israel and given you access to Him, to perform the duties of YHWH's Tabernacle and to minister to the community and serve them? [10]Now that He has advanced you and all your fellow Levites with you, do you seek the priesthood too?[202] [11]Truly, it is against YHWH that you and all your company have banded together. For who is Aaron that you should rail against him?" [Num. 16:8-11]

According to Milgrom, the "'duties'" mentioned in verse 8 refer "to the Levitical responsibility and privilege of dismantling, transporting, and reassembling the Tabernacle and its sancta."[203] In essence, Moses' rhetorical question stresses that Korah already enjoys greater access to God than non-Levitical Israelites, for God has advanced Levites such as Korah not only in terms of social status but also by drawing them spatially closer to the Tabernacle.[204] In demanding further advancement, Korah, Moses discerns, actually seeks the priesthood itself. Since God selected

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[198] This terminology draws from Wolfgang Iser's concept of the textual repertoire.
[199] Terrence E. Fretheim, commentary on Numbers 16:3, in *NAOBNRSV*, 213.
[200] Moses ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Mivḥar*, quoted in Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 131, 313, n. 10.
[201] The Jewish Publication Society reads, "Moses said *further* to Korah" (Num. 16:8) [emphasis added].
[202] See Numbers 3:6.
[203] Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 132.
[204] On the meaning of "serve them," see Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 132; Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 413. The "advance" refers to Numbers 3:6. On "spatial positioning," see Adriane Leveen, *Memory and Tradition in the Book of Numbers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chap. 5, especially pages 114-115. The expression, "spatial positioning," appears on page 102.

Aaron as the High Priest, Korah, in fact, rebels against God as well.[205] He rejects both human and divine authority.

In the next literary station, Moses constructs a strategy to defeat the insurrection. According to these plans, Korah and his band will "[6]take fire pans, [7]and tomorrow put fire in them and lay incense on them before YHWH. Then the man whom YHWH chooses, he shall be the holy one" (Num. 16:6-7). God, not Moses or Aaron, will ultimately decide who merits the priesthood. Without indicating any passage of time, the literary station concludes, "Each of them took his fire pan, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and took his place at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, as did Moses and Aaron" (Num. 16:18).

With everyone having readied their fire pans and taken their "place[s] at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting" (Num. 16:18), God there appears "to the whole community" (Num. 16:19b). At that moment, Moses and Aaron make a last-minute appeal: "[20b]Moses and Aaron[22a]fell on their faces and said, 'O God, [15b]pay no regard to their [Korah and his band's] oblation'" (Num. 16:22a, 15b). Almost immediately thereafter, "a fire went forth from YHWH and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense" (Num. 16:35). Milgrom observantly remarks that this verse does not include Korah amongst those who perished by fire; however, "it must be presumed that he too died by the divine fire in the original story" as Numbers 17:5 suggests.[206] For seeking control of the priesthood and thus control over the sacrificial cult and offerings by fire, Korah and his band themselves became offerings by fire. The punishment fits the crime.[207]

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[205] Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 422; Nili S. Fox, commentary on Numbers 16:8-11, in *JSB*, 317; Leveen, *Memory and Tradition in the Book of Numbers*, 123.
[206] Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 138.
[207] Aaron, *Etched in Stone*, 215.

Throughout the Bible, God employs fire as a method of divine recompense. To punish the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah, God casts fire on the inhabited areas:[208] "[24]YHWH rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from YHWH out of heaven. [25]He annihilated those cities and the entire Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation of the ground" (Gen. 19:24-25). In the wilderness, God sets fire to people themselves: "And fire came forth from YHWH and consumed them [Nadav and Avihu]; thus they died at the instance of YHWH" (Lev. 10:2); "The people took to complaining bitterly before YHWH. YHWH heard and was incensed: a fire of YHWH broke out against them, ravaging the outskirts of the camp" (Num. 11:1); "And a fire went forth from YHWH and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense" (Num. 16:35).[209] Divine fire kills indirectly in cities but directly in the wilderness. This difference likely stems from the different character of these places. Structures and people crowd cities but not the wilderness. Accordingly, in the Bible, death by fire in cities frequently transpires "behind closed doors;" death by fire in the wilderness always happens in plain sight. There, heat constitutes a condition of existence and a constant reminder of human vulnerability, and the fiery executions of Korah and his advocates exploits these associations, reminding the Israelites of their dependence on God who can either provide the obedient with waters to extinguish their thirst or cast down unquenchable fire on the defiant. By its very nature, then, the wilderness, with its barren, open landscape, makes fiery death a spectacle.

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[208] Cf. Exodus 9:23 where, at God's behest, "Moses held out his rod toward the sky, and YHWH sent thunder and hail, and fire streamed down to the ground, as YHWH rained down hail upon the land of Egypt." Verse 25 states that "the hail struck down all that were in the open" in Egypt. One might argue, therefore, that God also directly smites people with fire in densely populated areas. However, that same verse displays no cognizance of the fire; it mentions only hail. It seems, then, that the redactor here integrates two different traditions. The gloss in verse 24 that describes "fire flashing in the midst of the hail" further suggests this idea.

[209] See Weston W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 250 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 136. See also 2 Kings 1:10-12.

After the incineration of Korah and his supporters, God instructs Aaron's son, Eleazar to "[3][r]emove the fire pans" and make them "into hammered sheets as plating for the altar" to "serve as a warning to the people of Israel. …[5]It was to be a reminder [זִכָּרוֹן] to the Israelites, so that no outsider—one not of Aaron's offspring—should presume to offer incense before YHWH and suffer the fate of Korah and his band" (Num. 17:3-5). The plating conveys this message by functioning as a "זִכָּרוֹן," (Num. 17:5), a word that "connotes a visible reminder, such as a written document or an inscription."[210] Yet, in contrast to written texts, the plating offers testimony through the faculty not of speech but of sight. In this way, it impacts viewers more immediately, for there is no language to decipher; there is only the plating, made from the rebels' fire pans that not only served the insurgents but also endured the divine fire that incinerated Korah and his retinue. Not an allusion but a referent, not a symbol but the thing itself, the plating constitutes a participant-witness that is itself perpetual direct testimony and an embodiment of God's wrath.

The Dathan and Abiram Episode

Unlike Korah, Dathan and Abiram rebel against Moses, the secular leader of the Israelites. As Numbers 16:12-14 reads:

> [12]Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab; but they said, "We will not come! [13]Is it not enough that you brought us from a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, that you would also lord it over us? [14]You have not even brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, or given us possession of fields and vineyards.[211] Would you gouge out those men's eyes? We will not come!'" [Num. 16:12-14]

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[210] Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 419.

[211] I follow Timothy R. Ashley's translation in his *The Book of Numbers*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 299. The Jewish Publication Society's rendering does not make sense: "'Even if you had brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, and given us possession of fields and vineyards, should you gouge out those men's eyes? We will not come!'" (Num. 16:14) Were Moses actually to bring Dathan and Abiram to a fertile land, then Moses would *not* actually be "gouging out their eyes," that is, misleading them.

Dathan's and Abiram's retort ironically subverts the traditional ascription of "a land flowing with milk and honey" to Israel by attributing it instead to Egypt. As that lexical collocation euphemistically expresses the fertility of any given land, Dathan and Abiram here accost Moses for having taken the Israelites from Egypt, where although enslaved they had a consistent source of food and water, to a barren wasteland, a place of starvation and death. According to Jo Ann Hackett, "gouge out so-and-so's eyes" means "deceive them,"[212] and numerous other scholars share this interpretation.[213] Additionally, Levine argues, "Reference to the eyes of 'those men' is euphemistic for 'our eyes.' …When some awful harm or evil is spoken of, it is customary to deflect its effects onto a third person or persons."[214] Thus, according to Levine, "'those men's eyes'" (Num. 16:14) actually means the eyes of Dathan and Abiram.[215] It would seem, then, that Dathan and Abiram here rhetorically question whether Moses would continue to mislead *them*. "Although Dathan and Abiram's motive is not explicitly stated," Milgrom explains, "it is hinted at by their accusation that Moses wants to 'lord it over us' (v. 13). Thus, 'We will not come' (vv. 12, 14) clearly implies 'We will no longer obey your orders'—an open break with Moses' authority."[216] In no uncertain terms, Dathan and Abiram launch an open revolt against the secular leadership.

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[212] Jo Ann Hackett, commentary on Numbers 16:14, in *HCSB*, 224.
[213] Herbert Marks, ed., *The English Bible*, vol. 1, *The Old Testament* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 284; Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 134; Rashi on Numbers 16:14; Rashbam on Numbers 16:14; George Buchanan Gray, *Numbers: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 201.
[214] Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 414.
[215] Following Rashi (on Numbers 16:14), Milgrom also prefers this interpretation but also cites Moses Ibn Ezra (on the same verse) who claims, in Milgrom's words, "'Those men' refers to…the elders who accompanied Moses (v. 25)." *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 134.
[216] Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 133.

After turning to the deity and declaring his innocence of having "exploit[ed]" or "wrong[ed]" Dathan and Abiram,[217] Moses receives an oracle: "[23]YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, [24]'Speak to the community and say: Withdraw from about the abodes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram'" (Num. 16:23-24). Since the redactor melded the Korah and the Dathan and Abiram episodes together in Numbers 16, the narrative in the Torah has a different sequence of events that poses a problem. Whereas Moses, Aaron and his sons, Korah and his retinue, and the rest of the people stand before the Tabernacle in verses 18-22, verses 23-27 relocate the community to the environs of Dathan and Abiram's abodes. In essence, an "abrupt displacement," as Milgrom puts it, occurs without any explanation.[218] Yet, by disentangling the Korah story from the Dathan and Abiram account, this problem disappears. That is, in my reconstruction of the Dathan and Abiram episode in the table at the end of this chapter, no displacement occurs. When Moses hears word of the brothers' refusal to appear before him, protests to God, and then receives instructions to speak to the community outside of "the abodes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram'" (v. 24), then, "Moses rose and went" there with "the elders of Israel following him" (v. 25). Of course, Korah does not belong in the Dathan and Abiram story; mention of him in verse 24 simply reflects how the redactor melded the narratives together.

No sooner does Korah appear in verse 24 than does he disappear in verse 25 after which Moses, in accord with the oracle, instructs the people to withdraw from Dathan's and Abiram's tents. He also cautions the Israelites to "'touch nothing that belongs to them [Dathan and Abiram], lest you be wiped out for all their sins'" (Num. 16:26). According to this verse,

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[217] As working animals, donkeys were valuable. Asserting that he had never stolen their valuable property, Moses thus exculpates himself before God from having "exploit[ed]" or "wrong[ed]" Dathan and Abiram. Aaron (lecture, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH, November 15, 2018).
[218] Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 416.

"transgression" constitutes a contagion that people can contract upon contact with contaminated objects. Moses thus warns the Israelites for their own safety lest they become guilty and suffer the punishment soon to befall Dathan and Abiram.[219]

After the community heeds Moses' counsel,[220] Dathan, Abiram, and the rest of their family assemble "at the entrance of their tents" (Num. 16:27). That these two brothers brought "their wives, their children, and their little ones" with them to stand before the entire community demonstrates Dathan's and Abiram's arrogance (Num. 16:27). That is, since they reject Moses' leadership, they haughtily believe in their security and that of their family.[221]

Dathan's and Abiram's conceit raises the stakes; Moses must quash their rebellion outright and prove his status as God's chosen leader. Towards that end, Moses proclaims to the entire community:

> [28]"By this you shall know that it was YHWH who sent me to do all these things; that they are not of my own devising: [29]if these men die as all men do, if their lot be the common fate of all mankind, it was not YHWH who sent me. [30]But if YHWH brings about something unheard-of, so that the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, you shall know that these men have spurned YHWH." [Num. 16:28-30]

Throughout this declaration, Moses uses language that always describes the leader as a divinely appointed position. Leaders cannot seize power for themselves, and the people cannot elect them. God alone decides who shall lead. Accordingly, Moses asserts that if God really did choose him, then, Dathan and Abiram have actually rebelled against the deity.[222] The manner in which the two brothers die will prove whether God selected him as the Israelites' leader.[223]

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[219] Aaron (lecture, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH, November 15, 2018).
[220] Numbers 16:27 reads, "So they withdrew from about the abodes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram." As already stated earlier, the mention of Korah evidences the fusion of the Korah narrative with that of Dathan and Abiram.
[221] Aaron (lecture, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH, November 15, 2018).
[222] Moses' argument parallels his refutation in the Korah narrative when he says, "'Truly, it is against the LORD that you [Korah] and all your company have banded together'" (Num 16:11).
[223] Aaron (lecture, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH, November 15, 2018).

God swiftly demonstrates support for Moses by performing the requested miracle:

> [31]Scarcely had he [Moses] finished speaking all these words [vv. 28-30] when the ground under them [Dathan, Abiram, and their families] burst asunder, [32]and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households, all Korah's people and all their possessions. [33]They went down alive into Sheol, with all that belonged to them; the earth closed over them and they vanished from the midst of the congregation. [Num. 16:31-33]

Once again, Korah's appearance here demonstrates how the redactor threaded that character's story with the Dathan and Abiram episode. As Psalm 106:16-18 indicates:

> [16]There was envy of Moses in the camp, and of Aaron, the holy one of YHWH.
> [17]The earth opened up and swallowed Dathan, closed over the party of Abiram.
> [18]A fire blazed among their party, a flame that consumed the wicked.

Psalm 106:17 makes no mention of Korah; the earth consumed only "Dathan… [and] the party of Abiram." Still, Psalm 106:18 presents problems of its own, for it suggests that the two brothers also died by fire in a punishment strongly reminiscent of Korah's death in Numbers 16:32-33. Instead of attributing the presence of these two punishments in Psalm 106 to carelessness or poetic license, Aaron suggests that

> given the fact that Korah dominates the narrative as we now have it in Numbers, we are witnessing an alternative conceptualization of the story line itself, not just a slight variant. My sense is that the sources from which the psalmist drew had either failed to conflate Dathan and Abiram with Korah, but preserved the Korah-based punishment, or simply told the Dathan and Abiram story quite differently.[224]

Following Aaron, then, Numbers 16:32 in the reconstruction of the Dathan and Abiram narrative presented in the table reads, "and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households, all… [Dathan's and Abriam's] people and all their possessions."[225] This scene unfolds in spectacular fashion. With the community gathered around Dathan and Abiram, the

[224] Idem., *Etched in Stone*, 79.
[225] See also Hackett, commentary on Numbers 16:32, in *HCSB*, 225, which supports my argument.

rebels stand as if on center stage in direct view of the audience there to watch the show. The Israelites behold the insurgents' descent into Sheol with their eyes, likely feel it with their bodies as the ground "burst[s] asunder" (Num. 16:31), and hear Dathan's and Abiram's "shrieks" (Num. 16:34). Even the earth participates in this spectacle of violence.

Several scholars understandably interpret this punishment as an earthquake.[226] After all, ancient Israelites would not have distinguished between natural and supernatural events, for they lacked the concept of natural law; God governed the world. They did not possess language like fault lines, tectonic plates, and seismic activity; they could only speak of God's doing "'something unheard-of'" (Num. 16:30) like causing the earth to open its mouth and swallow people alive. Be that as it may, such attempts at understanding Dathan's and Abiram's punishment from a contemporary, scientifically informed perspective miss the point. In describing the earth's consumption of people as "'something unheard-of'" (Num. 16:30), unprecedented, the biblical writer suggests that the manner in which Dathan and Abiram perish overturns the normal way of the divinely ruled world. Indeed, that the earth closes back over the rebels advises against identifying this incident as an earthquake.[227]

Similar punishments appear in only five other biblical verses.[228] Two of those instances, Deuteronomy 11:6 and Psalm 106:17, recount the Dathan and Abiram incident.[229] One may also

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[226] David Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School: A Retrieval of Ancient Sacerdotal Lore* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 218; Warren C. Robertson, *Drought, Famine, Plague and Pestilence: Ancient Israel's Understandings of and Responses to Natural Catastrophes*, Gorgias Dissertations 45 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), 64-65; Erin Runions, "Hysterical Phalli: Numbers 16, Two Contemporary Parallels, and the Logic of Colonization," in *Culture, Entertainment, and the Bible*, ed. George Aichele, JSOTSup. 309 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 187.

[227] Following Rambam and G. Hort, Levine argues that the earth's closing back over the rebels, "and not the earth's opening, is what constitutes" "'the something unheard-of'" (Numbers 16:30). Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 138. Levine cites Rambam on Numbers 16:33; G. Hort, "The Death of Qorah," *Australian Biblical Review* 7 (1959): 2-26.

[228] Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 428.

[229] Ibid.

disregard Exodus 15:12b, "The earth swallowed them [the Egyptians]," for Exodus 14:27-28; 15:1, 19 indicate that God actually drowns the Egyptians. In Psalm 55:16a, the psalmist appeals to God to send friends now turned foes, [230] "down alive into Sheol!" However, this verse lacks the imagery of the earth's opening and closing its mouth upon its victims. The closest parallel to Numbers 16:32-33 occurs in Psalm 141:7: "כִּמְוֹ פֹלֵחַ֥ וּבֹקֵ֗עַ בָּאָ֫רֶץ נְפִזְר֥וּ עַ֝צְמֵ֗ינוּ לִפְ֣י שְׁא֑וֹל." Unfortunately, because of the poor state of the Hebrew text,[231] the meaning of this verse remains somewhat opaque. Major biblical translations, however, do agree that the psalmist here compares either a rock or the earth, when broken up in some way, to a group of people's bones "scattered at the mouth of Sheol" (Ps. 141:7).[232] In any case, the scene does not recount descent into the underworld; rather, as Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler write, it presents "[a] graphic picture of Sheol" itself.[233] The punishment of Dathan and Abiram is exceedingly rare, indeed *suis generis*. It occurs in only one place in the Bible, in the wilderness narrative, precisely because, that land facilitates the earth's devouring of the insurgents on two different levels.

First, God desires to punish only Dathan, Abiram, and their "households."[234] Yet, Numbers 16:34 indicates that the Israelites "fled at their [Dathan, Abiram, and their households'] shrieks, for they said, 'The earth might swallow us!'" Clearly, the earth opened its mouth wider than intended. Although effective, the earth's consumption constitutes an imprecise method of punishment. Were the Dathan and Abiram episode to have occurred in a city, bustling with people and cramped with buildings, the Israelites would likely not have escaped successfully.

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[230] Berlin and Brettler, commentary on Ps 55:13-16, in *JSB*, 1342.
[231] Idem., commentary on Ps 141:7, in *JSB*, 1438.
[232] See, for example, the translations in the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and the Jewish Publication Society.
[233] Patrick D. Miller, commentary on Ps 141:3-7, in *HCSB*, 843; Berlin and Brettler, commentary on Ps 141, in *JSB*, 1438.
[234] That God instructs Moses to warn the Israelites to distance themselves from the insurgents to prevent the former from suffering the punishment to befall the latter indicates the deity's concern for the general community.

Second, these punishments produce such a visceral impact precisely because they transpire in the wilderness, a place whose infertility and inhospitality already threatens the Israelite sojourners. God simply uses the land to make good on those threats. Not only a spectator but also the means of perpetration, the wilderness inflicts spectacular violence on both Moses' and God's enemies.

The Punishments' Functions

The spectacular violence in the Korah and the Dathan and Abiram episodes operates on two levels. It speaks to the Israelites in these two stories and to the historical Judean exiles themselves. On the level of story, the Israelites actually behold the incineration of Korah and his retinue, and each regard of the plating on the altar triggers its beholders to *remember* that divine inferno, to *see* it again in their minds.[235] Similarly, in the Dathan and Abiram account, the Israelites find themselves garishly caught up in the miraculous punishment before them; it holds their eyes hostage to this terrifying sight. On the level of history, the Judean exiles construct these two scenes of spectacular violence in their heads; in the act of reading and of listening to these stories, they perform and see them in their minds' eye. On the level of story, the incineration of Korah and his retinue as well as the earth's consumption of Dathan, Abiram, and their households both visually affirms, respectively, Aaron's and Moses' leadership as divinely sanctioned and deters the Israelites from challenging those leaders' sovereign power with the threat of death. On the level of history, Aaron and Moses, respectively, represent the Judean priestly and secular authorities in Babylonia where they bore the responsibility of ensuring that both they and the community at large would preserve their identity. Accordingly, the spectacular violence in Numbers 16-17:5 works to entrench the Judean leaders' sovereign power over the

[235] Here, I am playing with the Latin *rememorari*, meaning "'call to mind.'" Angus Stevenson and Maurice Waite, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 12th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), s.v. "remember."

community in exile ultimately to maintain their identity and to discourage people from revolting against that leadership.

An Ethics of Reading: The Exile of the Ethical from the Political

Readers, especially of the Bible, rarely question the narratives presented to them because, they often do not detect that narrators and authors tell and compose stories in certain ways to promote different ideologies. Ben De Bruyn explains that "it is no coincidence that the work assigns particular ideologies to the narrator, the secondary characters and the narratee. A novel about fascism, for instance, will have a different impact on the reader if this ideology is assigned to the work's protagonist rather than his antagonist."[236] Numbers 16 follows this same pattern, for it portrays Korah, Dathan, and Abiram as jealous power mongers who, for rejecting Moses' and Aaron's leadership, appropriately suffer. Yet, as the aphorism goes, "There are two sides to every story," and Numbers 16 presents only one.

I would like to recover the other side of the stories in Numbers 16 by reading as a "resisting reader. Reading against the grain, then, I ask, "What if Moses and Aaron and the parallel secular and priestly leaders in the Second Temple Period really were abusing their positions?" In what follows, I assume that Korah's, Dathan's, and Abiram's accusations do not distort but, in fact, reflect reality. From this perspective, Aaron *did* "raise [himself]… above YHWH's congregation" (Num. 16:3), and Moses *did* "lord [his power] over" the Israelites (Num. 16:13). By extension, Israelite leaders during the Second Temple Period did likewise. The use of spectacular violence within Numbers 16 and the writing of this story reveal a collapse of the ethical in politics both within the narrative and at some point in history. To clarify what I

[236] Ben De Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser: A Companion*, Companions to Contemporary German Culture 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 118. Here, Bruyn comments on Iser's notion of the "foreground-background relationship."

mean by the "collapse of ethical in politics," I offer a brief account of Lévinas' conception of politics.

Unlike Arendt who controversially sees politics as an end of itself, Lévinas, with his unwavering insistence that the face-to-face relationship undergirds all of life, conceives of politics as a means towards or, perhaps more precisely, partner of ethics. His notion of politics begins with what he calls the "third party," first introduced in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*.[237] Michael L. Morgan offers a clear explanation of this concept:

> As I read him, the third party is the image or figure that Levinas uses to pick out the fact of social existence at the ordinary, everyday level. That is, the face-to-face in which the particular other person confronts and calls into question the individual self or subject is bi-polar and structural. It involves two and only two persons who relate to one another as petitionary-commander and respondent. When a third party or third person is present, then that person is an other for the self's other and also an additional other to the self itself, and more, that is, the self is the other's other, and the self becomes the third party's other. In short, the presence of third parties creates a network of interpersonal, relational nexuses. … Politics is the set of strategic practices, institutions, and norms that we construct to organize that social reality.[238]

The entry of the third party into the previously exclusive dyadic relationship of the face-to-face gives birth to politics, for it gives birth to "human plurality" and raises the question: "Who, in this plurality, comes first?"[239] Put differently, should the I respond to the Other's call for help or to that of the Third, and what justifies the Other's acceptance of the I's succor? Does not the I also constitute an Other to the Other, and why should the Other respond to the I's plea for help

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[237] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 212-214; Michael L. Morgan, *Levinas's Ethical Politics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), 48.
[238] Morgan, *Levinas's Ethical Politics*, 48.
[239] Emmanuel Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation" (1982), in Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 166.

before that of the third party? The sentiment underlying such questions brings Lévinas to declare, "This is the time and place of the birth of the question: of a demand for justice!"[240]

But what does justice mean for Lévinas? Based on four interviews in which this Jewish philosopher referred to the Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Ha-Shanah 17b–18a,[241] Morgan explains that Lévinas' justice has five major characteristics: "First, we learn that for Levinas justice involves applying general principles fairly and impartially, regardless of who the particular agents are. And justice involves laws, the courts, and the other institutions of the state whose goal is to organize social life with an attention to this sort of just treatment." When the law favors one person or group of people over another, the former benefits, and the latter flounders. Justice, which hinges on fairness, must therefore treat people equally without attention to particularities. Justice is blind. Morgan continues, "Second, justice and the state are necessary. We cannot live without them. Human existence involves both everyday experience and a transcendental dimension of responsibility for other persons; each depends upon and limits the other." Justice helps translate ethics from the transcendental realm to the everyday world. Without justice, ethics never enters the world on the scale that it needs, and the I, with its infinite responsibilities, would, in serving only the Other, deprive the third party of succor. Without ethics, justice loses its very raison d'être and becomes a totalizing system that rejects all difference. Enter the third aspect of Lévinas' notion of justice: its limitations and imperfections. "[N]ot attending to the particularity of individuals is a strength of the principles and institutions

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[240] Ibid.

[241] Morgan cites "Interview with François Poirié," in *Is It Righteous to Be?*, ed. Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 69 [1986]; "Responsibility and Substitution," in *Is It Righteous to Be?*, 231 [1988]; "The Other, Utopia, and Justice," in *Entre Nous*, 230 [1988]; and "In the Name of the Other," in *Is It Righteous to Be?*, 194 [1992]. Morgan, *Levinas's Ethical Politics*, 356, n. 5.

of justice" because it enables justice to ensure that everyone receives equal and thus fair treatment. Yet,

> it is also a weakness…[for] it can easily lead us to forget that the reason to order social life is to help us to deal with each other as individuals, as particular persons. Fourth, even within the regime of justice there are opportunities for such responsiveness, moments or occasions when we can, within just practices, turn to and respond to individuals as individuals. We can call this "mercy" or "charity" or generosity or concern or sensitivity; it is a way that our fundamental responsibility to other persons is expressed in the midst of our public, everyday lives. Finally, we can develop a critique of political practices and institutions from the point of view of charity or responsibility to others, but we can also develop a critique from the point of view of justice.

In summary, then, justice is (1) blind; (2) necessary; (3) imperfect because it ignores particularity in general, but (4) it can also make room for exceptions, recognize the particularity of people; and (5) therefore "recognize its own weaknesses, imperfections, or limitations and criticize itself, so to speak," hopefully to improve.[242] How does justice relate to politics? Lévinas' says, "'justice…is inseparable from the political."[243] Politics, in short, administers justice "in the service of shaping a just and humane life for all its members."[244] In Lévinas' mind, humans utilize politics to translate the ethical into everyday life. As a result, "Ethics is the condition for and the measure of how politics is conducted, how everyday life ought to be lived."[245]

Lévinas' political thought, as Morgan argues, provides a basis for an ethically informed critique of politics.[246] I now return to my earlier claim. Politics, as Lévinas shows, helps realize the ethical in everyday life to the extent that it attends to the particular needs of Others. On a simplistic leve;, one may rightfully claim that the system of social organization depicted in

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[242] Morgan, *Levinas's Ethical Politics*, 9-10.
[243] "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas" (1986), in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 171.
[244] Morgan, *Levinas's Ethical Politics*, 56.
[245] Ibid., 51.
[246] Ibid., esp. chap. 4.

Numbers 16 does just the opposite: it enables Moses and Aaron to bring about the deaths of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram for threatening the former's leadership. There is yet, an additional and deeper insight that Levinas' conception of politics yields. Because politics constitutes a means towards an ethical end through justice, political leaders become especially responsible for the system of government of which they form a part. In a just system of government, political leaders use their power to raise up Others instead of themselves. In my resisting reading of Numbers 16, Moses and Aaron use their sovereign power and align it with spectacular violence to retain the power that they wield with impunity. Moses and Aaron serve themselves instead of the third party.

Conclusion and Implications

In this chapter, I argued that spectacular violence, facilitated by the wilderness, serves to reassert a threatened authority figure's power and to dissuade would-be insurgents from challenging their leadership. To support this claim, I examined the spectacular violence in Psalm 106. In the psalmist's depiction of events, God converts the Israelites into believers in the deity's redemptive powers by wielding the waters against the Egyptians at the Sea of Reeds. Likewise, by starving the people to death after miraculously providing them with sustenance, God exploits the wilderness' sterility to demonstrate the divine power to nullify and even outdo miracles already performed. In each case, the wilderness facilitates spectacular violence to reestablish God's power. After exploring Psalm 106, I proceeded to analyze Numbers 16-17:5. There, I also argued that fire and the earth, respectively, consume Korah and the brothers Dathan and Abiram in the *wilderness* because that open landscape heightens the drama. Moreover, in the former, God transforms the desert heat into fire; in the latter, the deity has the wasteland itself perpetrate the spectacle. In both stories, God weaponizes the wilderness to wreak spectacular violence. By

solidifying Aaron's and Moses' leadership, the punishments in Numbers 16-17:5 allegorically fortify the Judean priestly and secular authorities' power over the exiles to maintain their identity and deter people from further undermining the powers that be. In the end, then, spectacular violence masquerades as a project to preserve identity while insidiously reinforcing the hegemonic, hierarchical structure of the community.

In this way, driven by selfish instead of selfless interest, Moses and Aaron and the Israelite leaders in the Second Temple Period exile the ethical from the political. According to Arendt, the exercise of violence typically weakens those in power; yet, at least on the narrative level, this does not seem to be the case. What explains this aberration? By attacking Aaron and Moses whom the deity chose to lead the Israelites, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram also attack God (16:11, 30). This equation between Aaron, Moses, and God resembles the equation between the sovereign ruler and the law during the Middle Ages. Michel Foucault explains:

> Besides its immediate victim, the crime attacks the sovereign: it attacks him personally, since the law represents the will of the sovereign; it attacks him physically, since the force of the law is the force of the prince. 'For a law to be in force in this kingdom, it must necessarily have emanated directly from the sovereign, or at least been confirmed by the seal of his authority' (Muyart de Vouglans, xxxiv).[247] The intervention of the sovereign is not, therefore, an arbitration between two adversaries; it is much more, even, than an action to enforce respect for the rights of the individual; it is a direct reply to the person who has offended him.[248]

I use the phrase, *stratification of power*,[249] to refer to the phenomenon by which an agent or institution (e. g. the law) becomes an extension of the subject who enjoys sovereign power. The identification of Moses and Aaron with God in Numbers 16 exemplifies this concept. This stratification of power and its recourse to God gravely prevents justice, in the Lévinassian sense,

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[247] P. F. Muyart de Vouglans, *Instituts au droit criminel* (1757), cited in Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 47.
[248] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 47-48.
[249] I thank David H. Aaron for suggesting this terminology.

from becoming ever more just—that is, from constantly evaluating how well it attends to the particularity of the third party and correcting itself accordingly. Yes, Arendt is correct: "When we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name,"[250] but this notion does not hold in Numbers 16, for YHWH's power does not depend on the people's support. The spectacular violence inflicted on Korah, Dathan, and Abiram who were foolish enough to question God through their rebellion demonstrates that Aaron's and Moses' power flows from an unquestionable divine source.

Although the God of the Bible does not intervene in society today with spectacular violence and neither Moses nor Aaron exist, there is, increasingly, an apotheosis and divinization of political leaders, both by themselves and by those who elect them and worship them. Many liberal Jews may not think themselves divinely chosen, but some do, and certainly many believe that the United States has a special place in the world. Such conviction runs dangerously close to the stratification of power, for if others do not share American values, then, some absurd but all too real logic dictates that they must be eliminated. These increasingly polarized times call for a pacifistic vigilance, violence only begets more violence.

Table: The Korah and the Dathan and Abiram Episodes

Literary Stations	Korah Episode	Dathan and Abiram Episode
Complaint	[3]They combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and YHWH is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the YHWH's congregation?"	[12]Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab; but they said, "We will not come! [13]Is it not enough that you brought us from a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, that you would also lord it over us? [14]You have not even brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, or given us possession of fields and

[250] Arendt, *On Violence*, 44.

		vineyards. Should you gouge out those men's eyes? We will not come!"
Refutation	[4]When Moses heard this, he fell on his face. [….] [8]Moses said to Korah, "Hear me, sons of Levi. [9]Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has set you apart from the community of Israel and given you access to Him, to perform the duties of YHWH's Tabernacle and to minister to the community and serve them? [10]Now that He has advanced you and all your fellow Levites with you, do you seek the priesthood too? [11]Truly, it is against YHWH that you and all your company have banded together. For who is Aaron that you should rail against him?"	[15a]Moses was much aggrieved and he said to YHWH, [15c]"I have not taken the ass of any one of them, nor have I wronged any one of them."
Oracle	[……]	[23]YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, [24]"Speak to the community and say: Withdraw from about the abodes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram."
The Plan for Defeating the Insurrection (The Miracle Set Up)	[5]Then he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Come morning, YHWH will make known who is His and who is holy, and will grant him access to Himself; He will grant access to the one He has chosen. [6]Do this: You, Korah and all your band, take fire pans, [7]and tomorrow put fire in them and lay incense on them before YHWH. Then the man whom YHWH chooses, he shall be the holy one. You	[25]Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, the elders of Israel following him. [26]He addressed the community, saying, "Move away from the tents of these wicked men and touch nothing that belongs to them, lest you be wiped out for all their sins."

	have gone too far, sons of Levi!"[251] [……] [18]Each of them took his fire pan, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and took his place at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, as did Moses and Aaron. [19b]Then the Presence of YHWH appeared to the whole community.	[27]So they withdrew from about the abodes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Now Dathan and Abiram had come out and they stood at the entrance of their tents, with their wives, their children, and their little ones. [28]And Moses said, "By this you shall know that it was YHWH who sent me to do all these things; that they are not of my own devising: [29]if these men die as all men do, if their lot be the common fate of all mankind, it was not YHWH who sent me. [30]But if YHWH brings about something unheard-of, so that the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, you shall know that these men have spurned YHWH."
Appeal to God	[20b]Moses and Aaron[22a] fell on their faces and said, "O God,[15b]pay no regard to their oblation."[252]	

[251] Numbers 16:16-17 read, "And Moses said to Korah, 'Tomorrow, you and all your company appear before YHWH, you and they and Aaron. Each of you take his fire pan and lay incense on it, and each of you bring his fire pan before the LORD, two hundred and fifty fire pans; you and Aaron also bring your fire pans.'" Jacob Milgrom notes that these verses "are a repetition of verses 6-7, except that Aaron, missing there, is explicitly mentioned here. And the Levites, who are addressed in verses 6-7, are missing here. Possibly Korah stands for all the rebellious Levites." *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 134.

[252] Levine writes, "In v 22…we read that Moses and Aaron again fell prostrate and appealed to God for assistance." *Numbers 1-20*, 412. Levine's comment on this particular act of prostration as an appeal to God spurred me to maintain its place in the Korah narrative as opposed to omitting it as Aaron does in David H. Aaron, "Leadership Crisis: The Qorah, Datan, & Abiram Episode(s): NU 16," (lecture handout, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH, November 15, 2018). However, I have replaced the remaining portion of Numbers 16:22, "'Source of the breath of all flesh! When one man sins, will You be wrathful with the whole community?'" with Numbers 16:15b, "'pay no regard to their oblation.'" Aaron places the entirety of Numbers 16:15 in the Dathan and Abiram narrative (ibid.), but Numbers 16:15b, I claim, does not belong there, for Dathan and Abiram never offer an oblation like Korah and his retinue do. See Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 134. This reconstruction requires that I split Numbers 16:15 into three segments: [a] "Moses was much aggrieved and he said to the LORD, [b] 'Pay no regard to their oblation. [c] I have not taken the ass of any one of them, nor have I wronged any one of them.'" I place Numbers 16:15a, c in the Dathan and Abiram episode.

Miracle	[35]And a fire went forth from YHWH and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense.	[31]Scarcely had he finished speaking all these words when the ground under them burst asunder, [32]and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households, all **…** [Dathan's and Abriam's] people and all their possessions. [33]They went down alive into Sheol, with all that belonged to them; the earth closed over them and they vanished from the midst of the congregation.
Concluding Episode	17[1]YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: [2]Order Eleazar son of Aaron the priest to remove the fire pans—for they have become sacred—from among the charred remains; and scatter the coals abroad. [3]Remove the fire pans of those who have sinned at the cost of their lives, and let them be made into hammered sheets as plating for the altar—for once they have been used for offering to YHWH, they have become sacred—and let them serve as a warning to the people of Israel. [4]Eleazar the priest took the copper fire pans which had been used for offering by those who died in the fire; and they were hammered into plating for the altar, [5]as YHWH had ordered him through Moses.	[34]All Israel around them fled at their shrieks, for they said, "The earth might swallow us!"
The Lesson	It was to be a reminder to the Israelites, so that no outsider—one not of Aaron's offspring—should presume to offer incense before YHWH and suffer the fate of Korah and his band.	

CHAPTER FIVE

PREEMPTIVE AND MUSTERING VIOLENCE: THE GANGRAPE AND DISMEMBERMENT OF A NAMELESS WOMAN, AND DEAFENING THE I TO THE CRY OF THE OTHER

> It [the Book of Judges] is strange on so many levels. Joshua dies twice in the book (1: 1; 2:8). Many of the "judges" are really anti-heroic—think of Samson and his womanizing, Jephthah and his vow, Gideon and his lack of faith. There is a strange mixing of genres in the book: most of the stories are relatively long, and focus on a single individual (" major judges"), but at two points we find judges noted in little more than lists (10: 1-4; 12:8-15), with such fascinating information as (10:4) "He had thirty sons, who rode on thirty burros and owned thirty boroughs in the region of Gilead." Women are unusually prominent throughout the book, and play a wide range of roles in it. And some of the stories are quite fantastic—how are we to take a narrative which suggests that a woman was butchered into twelve parts, and each one was sent to a tribe of Israel (19:29)?
> —Marc Zvi Brettler[253]

Introduction

In the above epigraph, Marc Zvi Brettler captures the strangeness that marks the Book of Judges. He notes seeming repetitions, the prominent roles that women play, and stories of the fantastical. Discontinuity, destruction, defragmentation, and death also pervade and even define Judges.[254] This combination of these nightmarish factors has led some scholars to similar conclusions. Mieke Bal argues that dissymmetry of power between men and women lends coherence to a book that is otherwise "confused, unclear, enigmatic."[255] Influenced by that thought, Don Michael Hudson sees the "narrative written in a downward spiral revealing Israel's failure to serve Yhwh only and the consequences of such disobedience with the result that, in the end, Israel, rather than the 'alien' nations, begins to dismember itself into oblivion."[256] Cheryl Exum

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[253] Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges* (London: Routledge, 2002), ix-x.
[254] Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Don Michael Hudson, "Living in a Land of Epithets: Anonymity in Judges 19-21," *JSOT* 62 (1994): 50.

states, "The political and moral instability depicted in Judges is reflected in the textual instability,"[257] and Cynthia Edenburg likewise claims, "Behind the bizarre and gruesome narrative [of Judges] cast in the distant past lies a political polemic that deals with the threat of factitiousness and the dissolution of unity of an ideal postexilic 'Israel.'"[258] Each of these readings bespeaks a sense of disjointedness, disequilibrium, and deterioration.

Judges reaches the apex of its strangeness in the last three chapters of the book. Arguably the most disturbing narrative in the entire Hebrew Bible, Judges 19-21 tells how the harrowing gangrape and dismemberment of an unnamed woman triggers an Israelite war that would have annihilated the Benjaminites were it not for the capture of six hundred innocent women with whom they forcibly cohabit. Some scholars like Marc Zvi Brettler[259] and Sara J. Milstein[260] argue that Judges 19-21 launches an anti-Saulide polemic (Tikva Frymer-Kensky vigorously rejects this argument[261]). Accordingly, I do not discuss the anti-Saulide polemic in this chapter because they have extensively studied this matter already. Weston W. Fields[262] and Cynthia Edenburg, however, contend that these three chapters polemicize against the Benjaminites.[263] I also agree with both of these interpretations to some extent because Judges 19-21 condemns *both* of these groups, not one or the other. Like Lillian R. Klein, Jacqueline E. Lapsley, Susan Niditch,

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[257] Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 412.
[258] Cynthia Edenburg, *Dismembering the Whole: Composition and Purpose of Judges 19-21*, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 24 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 321.
[259] Marc Zvi Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 3 (1989): 412-413; idem., *The Book of Judges* (London: Routledge, 2002), chap. 6.
[260] Sara J. Milstein, "Saul the Levite and His Concubine: The 'Allusive' Quality of Judges 19," *Vetus Testamentum* 66 (2016): 95-116, doi:10.1163/15685330-12301227.
[261] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 124-125, 128, 134-135.
[262] Weston W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative*, JSOTSup. 231 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 47ff.
[263] Edenburg, *Dismembering the Whole*.

and Heidi M. Szpek, I maintain that this narrative contains a much more comprehensive critique of Israelite society as a whole that supports the establishment of kingship.

I primarily focus on Judges 19 because its account of the gangrape and subsequent dismemberment of the nameless woman constitute, for me, the most disturbing acts of violence in this narrative, for they do violence to her entire person—her subjectivity, sexuality, psychology, and bodily integrity. How do the fiendish men's heinous treatment of her fit into the author's pro-monarchical critique of Israelite society? What conditions capacitate the perpetration of such perfect and unspeakable violence?

Although Arendt continues to play an important role in this chapter since I devote a significant portion of it to determine the function of violence in Judges 19, her conception of power does not have the same utility here because the unnamed woman does not act according to Arendt's understanding. To analyze the power dynamics at play, then, I turn to Michel Foucault's writing on power and will first offer a brief and, regrettably, grossly simplistic overview of it. Afterwards, I analyze Judges 19-21 with my primary focus on the first of those three chapters. My thesis is twofold. Set in a world where Israelites exhibit inhospitality; perpetrate war, mass slaughter, and genocide; and abduct innocent women; the unconscionable gangrape and dismemberment of the anonymous girl, I first argue, show that Israel degenerates into depravity and splinters into schism in the absence of a king. Second, I maintain that ancient Israel's sexual discourse creates a dissymmetry of power that essentially objectifies the woman and therefore legitimates violence against her. Were she, and other oppressed people like her, to inhabit a different subject position through which more power flows, then her victimizers would not see her as an object but as a person with a face.

Michel Foucault on Power

Michel Foucault arguably studied power more deeply than any other thinker. Although this subject pervades the entirety of his oeuvre, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* contains his most sophisticated and comprehensive exploration of power.[264] A key paragraph reads:

> It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as [1] the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as [2] the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as [3] the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as [4] the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.[265]

In bracketing the numbers above to identify four elements of Foucauldian power, I follow Richard A. Lynch whose cogent explanation of this dense quotation largely informs the following discussion. Lynch identifies four elements of Foucauldian power. The first concerns what Foucault calls "force relations." Noting how Foucault's neologism "micro-physics" uses physics analogically,[266] Lynch writes, "Force relations seem to be the basic unit, the undefined or given, in this approach to power. Very broadly, force relations consist of whatever in one's social interactions that pushes, urges or compels one to do something."[267] Not people in power but power itself interests Foucault.

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[264] Richard A. Lynch, "Foucault's Theory of Power," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor, 14 (Oxon: Routledge, 2014).
[265] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, *Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 92-93.
[266] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 26; Lynch, "Foucault's Theory of Power," 19.
[267] Lynch, "Foucault's Theory of Power," 19.

Lynch identifies "[t]hree features of force relations."[268] The first is what Foucault calls their "multiplicity," by which he means that a heterogeneity of complimentary and oppositional, interpenetrating and interrelated force relations, the strength of which varies according to context, pervades human life.[269] Second, people cannot touch this multiplicity of force relations like they can concrete objects because Foucault regards force relations as "*imminent* in the sphere in which they operate."[270] Lynch explains, "[Foucault] means that they [force relations] exist only within a certain domain or discourse. In other words, they are not concrete, like bodies, but incorporeal, like the laws of physics. They are nevertheless present—and like the laws, their presence can be felt in very concrete ways."[271] Third, force relations organize themselves in accord with the "aims and objectives" of any given group of people that uses power.[272]

Foucault secondly characterizes power as "the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them [force relations]."[273] The arrangement of force relations do not remain static;[274] they change, shift, and enter into new arrangements. Tony Schirato, Geoff Danaher, and Jen Webb helpfully define Foucauldian power as "a complex flow and a set of relations between different groups and areas of society that changes with circumstances and time."[275] Power flows, and its force relations take different forms as they undergo combative interactions among people. Foucault purposefully enlists

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[268] Lynch, "Foucault's Theory of Power," 20.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 72. Emphasis added.
[271] Lynch, "Foucault's Theory of Power," 21.
[272] Ibid., 21-22.
[273] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 72.
[274] Lynch, "Foucault's Theory of Power," 25.
[275] Tony Schirato, Geoff Danaher, and Jen Webb, *Understanding Foucault: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2012), xxv.

military language as he seeks to capture the gladiatorial aspect of force relations' dynamism to demonstrate that power is never property but always distributed. Accordingly, wherever power exists, there is also resistance and therefore the potential for people to fight back and rearrange the force relations to their own advantage.[276]

Foucault thirdly describes power as "the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, *or* on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another."[277] That is to say, power also designates that which, as a result of the processes by which force relations enter into new arrangements, either strengthens new formations of force relations *or* separates them and isolates them, that is, prevents them from entering into advantageous relationships. One might call power, in this sense, the *seam of force relations*. I use seam purposefully because it is a contranym that carries both the sense of suturing together, of binding, and also of that of an interstice, a gap. These seams shape and strengthen or weaken force relations.

Fourth and finally, Foucault takes power to include "the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies."[278] In short, power denotes the strategic ways of enlisting force relations to realize goals. An additional aspect of power that Lynch does not mention concerns its intimate relationship with knowledge. "Power produces knowledge,"[279] Foucault writes, and discourse plays an instrumental role in this process. Foucault has a distinctive understanding of discourse because, for him, it "does not refer merely

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[276] Michel Foucault, "Powers and Strategies," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 142.
[277] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*,72. Emphasis added.
[278] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 72-73.
[279] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 27.

to the content of communication but the ways in which communication, information, ideas, and other sequences of signs are exchanged and signified."[280] Discourse influence the power of any given person because it shapes his/her subject-position. As Foucault explains: "The positions of the subject are…defined by the situation that it is possible for him to occupy in relation to the various domains or groups of objects." Put differently, discourse defines the occupant of any given subject-position in relation to his/her interlocutors—acquaintances and colleagues, friends and foe, family and loved ones—to the larger world that s/he inhabits along with countless other people and other animate and animate objects. For example, when one asks another a question, the questioner occupies the subject-position of "the questioning subject" and the addressee that of "the listening subject," who, by responding, can then become the responding subject. Foucault also speaks of "the seeing subject" and "the observing subject…To these…situations should be added the positions that the subject can occupy in the information networks (in theoretical teaching or in hospital training; in the system of oral communication or of written document: as emitter and receiver of observations, case-histories, statistical data, general theoretical propositions, projects, and decisions)."[281] By "information networks," Foucault seems to mean different domains of life, each with its own particular body of knowledge. For example, in universities and colleges, "Professor so and so," signals that the holder of that title has expertise in some discipline, knows its technical language, and how to communicate appropriately. In academia, then, professors, by virtue of their knowledge, enjoy more power than their undergraduate students do. That said, in a martial arts studio, a premedical student who holds a

[280] Schirato, Danaher, and Webb, *Understanding*, 33-34. Here, Schirato, Danaher, and Webb explain Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 48-49.
[281] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, 52.

black belt will have more power than his/her professor of biochemistry, new to self-defense. Context matters. Accordingly, "there are points in Foucault's analysis," Herman Rapaport writes, "when he even says that a subject-position is simply to be considered a social or situational role."[282] As I will show, the subject-position/social role that she occupies in Judges 19 renders her powerless.

The Woman's Tragic Fate, Israelite Civil War, and the Capture of Innocent Women

Judges 19 opens with the narratorial observation that "there was no king in Israel" (Judg. 19:1). This statement appears four times in the Book of Judges (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; and 21:25) as either a prelude, "refrain,"[283] or "coda."[284] In each case, the tale introduced or closed by this remark ends badly. From the very beginning, then, the author entrusts the telling of this story to a subjective narrator whose negative evaluation works to shape the reader's own attitude towards the narrative about to unfold. As Jacqueline E. Lapsley appropriately comments, "The first words in Judges 19 signal to the alert reader that what follows will not be a happy story. …[T]his phrase…reinforce[s] the link between the kinglessness of Israel and the moral disarray depicted in the text."[285]

At some point when Israel had no king, "a Levite [אִישׁ לֵוִי] residing at the other end of the hill country of Ephraim took to himself a concubine [פִּילֶגֶשׁ] from Bethlehem in Judah" (Judg. 19:1). The author did not need to include both "אִישׁ" and "לֵוִי" in verse 1; either alone would have

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[282] Herman Rapaport, *The Theory Mess: Deconstruction in Eclipse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 75. Rapaport's discussion of Foucault's notion of the subject-position begins on the previous page and contains both the preceding quotation from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and a corresponding analysis.
[283] Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, JSOTSup. 68 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988), 162-161.
[284] Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 37.
[285] Ibid. Alternatively, Barry G. Webb suggests, "It predisposes us to expect that the chaos [begun in Judg. 17-18] will continue in what follows, though what form it will take remains to be seen." *The Book of Judges*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 454.

sufficed. Accordingly, J. Alberto Soggin writes that "the fact that the young man is a levite [sic] is unimportant for the purpose of the narrative, so much so that K. Budde, 1897 and others, following him, suggest deleting it (Jüngling, 1976, is the most recent to favour this)."[286] Nevertheless, the man's Levitical status matters for, as Tikva Frymer-Kensky writes, "The Levites were landless people…They had no fixed place in the tribal system of pre-monarchic Israel: there was no particular geographical area in the land of Israel that was called 'Levite.' As a result, the Levite was an 'outsider' everywhere. …In the days of our story, the Levite was a figure of both power and danger, centrality and marginality."[287] The word, "לֵוִי," then, plays an important role: it marks the Levite as a subject through which a substantial amount of power flows and as one whom danger follows.

The narrator uses the word, "אִישׁ," to further accentuate the antipodal relationship between the husband and wife (Judg. 19:1). The former is not only a Levite but also a man, a husband, in contrast to a woman who is not an אִישָׁה, a wife, but a פִּילֶגֶשׁ, a concubine. "Unlike a wife," writes Lillian R. Klein, "a concubine was acquired without any protracted bargaining between the families involved."[288] Klein arrives at this conclusion based on the observation of Raphael Patai who writes, "A free man could acquire a slave girl for the purpose of sexual gratification, just as he could purchase a male or female slave for the purpose of doing any kind of work in the home. …If a man had no wife but only a concubine, her status *approximated* that of a wife."[289] Yet, approximation does constitute equation. Although the Levite's only partner,

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[286] J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, trans. John Bowden, OTL (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), 284. Soggin here cites Karl Budde, *Das Buch der Richter* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1897); H. W. Jüngling, *Plädoyer für das Königtum; eine stilistische Analyse der Tendenzerzählung Ri. 19,1-30a; 21.25,* Diss. Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome, 1976.
[287] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 119.
[288] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 232, n. 2.
[289] Raphael Patai, *Sex and Marriage in the Bible and the Middle East* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1959), 41, 43. Emphasis added.

the concubine has a "secondary status" to that of a wife.[290] Indeed, Barry G. Webb notes that "the way the beginning of their relationship is described *(he took [her] for himself)* suggests that she had no say in the matter, and that he regards her more as his property than his partner."[291] Here, then, "the power dissymmetry between husband and wife is even more pronounced than in the average patriarchal household, and the relationship of husband to wife is placed in high relief."[292] In short, the Levite enjoys superiority both by virtue of his caste and his gender, and the author will capitalize on the resultant power imbalance between husband and wife. Although no violence has yet been done, the potential for its eruption already exists.[293]

Still, even the priest's power is not absolute. After all, despite his elite Levitical status, he did not marry an אִישָׁה, a wife, but a פִּילֶגֶשׁ, a concubine. "Given these conditions," Klein remarks, "the Levite seems to have bought the girl for purposes of sexual gratification or housekeeping (or both), possibly because he could not afford the bride price of a wife."[294] the reader has reason to question the Levite's rank.

The narrator strengthens this suspicion in the next verse. Judges 19:2 reads, "Once his concubine וַתִּזְנֶה him [עָלָיו], leaving him for her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah; and she stayed there a full four months." How one should understand, "וַתִּזְנֶה עָלָיו," remains deeply controversial for two reasons. First, the narrative does not explain "why the girl went home to

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[290] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 37.
[291] Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 455-456. Her apparent lack of agency starkly contrasts with Rebekah's partial control over her nuptial arrangements, for she has the opportunity to reject the proposed marriage to Isaac. See Genesis 24:58. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 456, n. 8. Still, as Webb writes, "It [the description of the Levite's acquisition of the concubine] doesn't necessarily imply this," for "the same language is used in Gen. 24:3 of Abraham's servant getting a wife for Isaac." Rebecca, however, is not a concubine. Therefore, the description of the of the Levite's acquisition of her "in conjunction here with *concubine*" suggests the plausibility of Webb's proposal. Ibid., and ns. 8-9.
[292] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 119.
[293] For similar comments see, Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Overtures to Biblical Theology 13 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 66.
[294] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 162-163.

her father;" it only states "וַתִּזְנֶה."[295] That word can mean either "to **commit fornication**" or "with עַל to **feel repugnance** against."[296] *HALOT* draws the latter from a different textual witness to Judges 19:2 in the Septuagint that reads "ὠργίσθη αὐτῷ." Enter the second problem: does the Masoretic Text or the Septuagint contain the correct tradition? Third, "the verb *znh* [זנה] is not elsewhere construed with *'l* [על] in this sense."[297] For now, I leave "וַתִּזְנֶה" untranslated.

In any case, the reader comes to discover that the Levite does not, in fact, completely "control" the woman. Whereas the first verse suggests that the Levite "is a subject; she, object," the second verse creates the opposite impression, for the "subject and object reverse. The lowly concubine acts (19:2)."[298] In this way, Boling, paraphrasing H. W. Jüngling, remarks that "the initiative for the separation begins with the woman, a singular instance in the Old Testament where it is only the man who has the right to repudiate her."[299] It appears that the Levite is not so powerful after all.

After four months of the woman's absence, the Levite decides to retrieve her: "Then her husband set out, with an attendant and a pair of donkeys, and went after her to woo her [לְדַבֶּר עַל־לִבָּהּ, literally to speak to her heart] and to win her back" (Judg. 19:3a). That the Levite has a servant *and* two donkeys suggests that he enjoys more wealth than one would expect of a man who has a concubine but no wife. In any case, the priest leaves, according to the narrator, "to woo" the woman back. The Hebrew phrase, "לְדַבֶּר עַל־לִבָּהּ," also appears in Genesis 34:3, 50:21; 1 Samuel 1:13; and Hosea 2:16. Save for its second occurrence,[300] this verbal phrase, Trible

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[295] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 120.
[296] *HALOT*, s.v. "זנה."
[297] Robert G. Boling, *Judges*, AB 6A (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 273-274.
[298] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 66.
[299] Boling, *Judges*, 284. Boling cites Jüngling, *Plädoyer für das Königtum*, 153.
[300] Here, the phrase reflects interiority as the NJPS reads, "Now Hannah was praying in her heart…" (1 Sam. 1:13). Significantly, here the heart that the subject addresses belongs to the speaker herself, not to another as it does in Genesis 34:3, 50:21; Judges 19:3; and Hosea 2:16.

notes, "connotes reassurance, comfort, loyalty, and love. …Thus the Levite's speaking to the heart of his concubine indicates love for her without specifying guilt. …[I]t portrays the master sympathetically."[301] Perhaps the Levite actually does care for her. If so, why then did he wait four months? This "one detail casts doubt on the nobility of the Levite's project."[302] His character and intentions remain unclear. In this way, the author sows seeds of doubt in the reader.

Without any narration about the Levite's journey to and arrival in Bethlehem, the story jumps somewhat abruptly forward to the moment that the Levite reunites with his wife: "She admitted him into her father's house; and when the girl's father saw him, he received him warmly" (Judg. 19:3b). Once again, this anonymous woman exercises her agency, for *she* brings the Levite into her father's house. She is the subject, he the object. "Yet," as Karla G. Bohmbach keenly remarks:

> it is this verse that also brings to an end this woman's assertion of herself. The text compresses into the first three verses of the Judges 19 narrative all the activities of this woman that mark her as something more and other than chattel; instead, she is shown to be a human being with thoughts and feelings of her own,.[303]

After entering the house, the Levite enjoys a heartfelt welcome from "[3b]the girl's father…he received him warmly. [4]His father-in-law, the girl's father, pressed him, and he stayed with him three days; they ate and drank and lodged there" (Judg. 19:3b-4). Since the first three days receive no narration, the reader does not know whether relations between the Levite and the woman worsened, improved, or remained the same. However, as the episode progresses, the

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[301] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 67. For similar comments, see Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 38; Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 457.
[302] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 38.
[303] Karla G. Bohmbach, "Conventions/Contraventions: The Meaning of Public and Private for the Judges 19 Concubine," *JSOT* 83 (1999): 92-93.

narrator subtly but clearly portrays the Levite as completely indifferent towards her. "[5]Early in the morning of the fourth day, he [the Levite] started to leave; but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, 'Eat something to give you strength [סְעָד לִבְךָ פַּת־לֶחֶם], then you can leave.' [6]So the two of them sat down and they feasted together. Then the girl's father said to the man, 'Won't you stay overnight and enjoy yourself [וְלִבֶּךָ]?' [7]The man started to leave, but his father-in-law kept urging him until he turned back and spent the night there." (Judg. 19:5-7). Still, the Levite makes no mention of the woman who deserted him. "Early in the morning of the fifth day," as on the previous day, [304] the Levite began to leave without his wife when her husband's "father-in-law, the girl's father" again successfully pressed his son-in-law to stay to eat: "The two of them ate, dawdling until past noon" (Judg. 19:7-8). In the woman's absence, the Levite does not speak to her. Although these verses do not relay the conversation between the two men, the Levite, in light of his conduct thus far, likely neither inquires after her wellbeing nor displays any interest in her whatsoever. This inattentiveness strikes the reader as highly ironic given that he "set out on this journey in order to 'speak to the heart' of his wife."[305]

The author uses this irony for two reasons. First, it strengthens the reader's nascent suspicion of the Levite. Second, since verse 3 prompts readers to anticipate the nameless woman's continuing agency and presence, the irony highlights her absence. As Lapsley writes, "The narrative draws attention to the absence of the young woman by stressing the togetherness of the two men. In verse 4 it is ambiguous whether the woman is included in the plural verbs, but by verse 6 the text leaves no room for doubt." Furthermore, the phrases, "the two of them

[304] Lapsley argues, "He apparently intends to leave with his wife (as he eventually does in v. 10), but *without having spoken to her heart*." *Whispering the Word*, 39. Verse 7, however, quite clearly indicates that the Levite intends to leave *alone*.
[305] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 39. See similarly, Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 164.

together" and "the two of them" (Judg. 19:6,8), further "emphasize…the community formed by the two men, and thus the isolation and absence of the young woman."[306] Be that as it may, the woman does not disappear from the story entirely. Her presence remains as a "trace" in the mention of "*her* father" in verse 3 and the six-fold repetition of the phrase, "the *girl*'s father" in Judges 19:3-6, 8-9 [emphasis added]. "As is true for some other women in the Bible, the young woman has been reduced to a trace in the text, but it is a trace to which the narrative itself is drawing attention."[307]

Of course, the narrator likely offers this implicit critique because Israelite men really did silence women in situations similar to that of the concubine. Lynda E. Boose writes, "Daughters were sexual property belonging exclusively to the father."[308] Likewise, husbands owned their "wi[ves']…sexuality."[309] This type of thinking creates, employs, and relies upon a discourse that assigns women a subject-position that defines them as objects just as the phrase "the *girl*'s father" does. This discourse strips women of their agency, for it does not recognize them as subjects though whom power flows. Powerless, women, like the nameless woman, become particularly prone to violence.

After the meal, "the man, his concubine, and his attendant started to leave" (Judg. 19:9): the Levite is leaving *with* his concbuine. Despite this fact, Lapsley argues that the father fails "to fulfill his mission."[310] This outcome certainly seems possible, for the story does not depict the

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[306] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 40.
[307] Ibid., 40-41.
[308] Lynda E. Boose, "The Father's House and the Daughter in It: The Structures of Western Culture's Daughter-Father Relationship," in *Daughters and Fathers*, ed. Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers, 45 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
[309] Marc Zvi Brettler, "Women and Psalms: Toward an Understanding of the Role of Women's Prayer in the Israelite Cult," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 30 (London: T&T Clark International, 1998).
[310] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 41.

Levite's reconciliation with his wife. The reader only witnesses their leaving together. Perhaps, the Levite has merely reclaimed her as his own, "his concubine" (Judg. 19:9). Ultimately, against Lapsley, I argue that the narrator omits these details to create ambiguity and force the reader to consider the different possibilities and their respective ethical implications. In any case, because of the late hour, "the girl's father" entreats the Levite to extend his stay one day more before. With disastrous consequences, the priest rejects this offer. Instead, "[h]e set out and traveled as far as the vicinity of Jebus—that is, Jerusalem; he had with him a pair of laden donkeys, and his concubine was with him" (Judg. 19:9-10).

Stuart Lasine properly notes the buffoonish nature of these scenes. He writes, "The father-in-law's repeated insistence on the Levite's remaining another day is itself an example of comic repetition, although its consequences are not totally comic."[311] Be that as it may, the woman's father has every reason to desire the reconciliation between his son-in-law and daughter, for it would restore "her to social and economic stability."[312] This goal, according to Lapsley, explains his insistence on the Levite's staying a fourth day, for "the man [the priest] started to leave" (Judg. 19:7) without the woman![313]

> By entreating the Levite to stay longer, he hopes that such a reconciliation might still be possible. …Her father thus urges the Levite to stay: "Strengthen your heart with a bit of bread, and afterward, you may go" (v. 5). This phrase, "strengthen your heart," here as elsewhere means essentially to eat something in order to regain strength. The woodenness of the translation of the Hebrew has the virtue, however, of disclosing the that father's entreaty has reintroduced the word "heart" into the story, first mentioned in verse 3 in connection with the Levite's mission to "speak to her heart."[314]

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[311] Stuart Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19: Lot's Hospitality in an Inverted World," *JSOT* 29 (1984): 56-57, n. 34.
[312] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 39.
[313] Lapsley argues, "He apparently intends to leave with his wife (as he eventually does in v. 10), but *without having spoken to her heart*." *Whispering the Word*, 39. Verse 7, however, quite clearly indicates that the Levite intends to leave *alone*.
[314] Ibid.

Noting how "the father-in-law repeats this word in each of his three further efforts to delay the Levite" (Judg. 19:6, 8-9), Lapsley argues, "This fourfold repetition of 'heart' cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence." By repeatedly using the word "heart" in his direct address to his son-in-law, the father-in-law subtly tries to remind the Levite that he travelled to Bethlehem "to speak to the heart" (Judg. 19:3) of the woman. Lapsley concludes, "The reader hears/reads how the narrator's disclosure of the Levite's task in verse 3 is echoed in the repeated entreaties of the young woman's father (the word appears five times in seven verses), and so is able to perceive his delaying tactics as an effort to bring about a sincere reconciliation between the couple."[315] Against Phyllis Trible who views the father-in-law's interactions with the Levite as "an exercise in male bonding,"[316] Lapsley shows that the host genuinely cares for his daughter's economic and social well-being.[317]

Still, the father does not have a clean record, for he either disregards the law or reveals himself to be a fool. If his daughter did commit adultery, then she, her father, and the Levite have all transgressed since Deuteronomy 22:21 stipulates stoning to death as punishment for adultery. Yet, the priest does not follow this law since

> this would leave the Levite without a woman for whatever purposes he had acquired her. The narrative leads one to believe that the Levite's needs are more important to him than Yahweh's moral strictures. …Neither the concubine nor the Levite have lived within the tradition of the covenant. For that matter, the concubine's father, who remains responsible for his daughter's behavior, is also remiss in not punishing her for her immoral action.[318]

[315] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 39-40.
[316] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 68.
[317] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 41.
[318] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 163.

If she did not commit adultery but instead fled from the Levite because he did not merely mistreat her but, in fact, abused her, as Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn suggest,[319] then, the Levite has wrongfully perpetrated violence, and responsibility for her safety would return to her father who cares for his daughter's socio-economic interest. Here, Lasine's comment on the comic character of the father's repeated entreaties comes to bear, for he reveals his stupidity through his continuous failure to perceive that the Levite has no genuine interest in his daughter's wellbeing. The priest simply wants to reclaim his property, and he exploits his father-in-law to reap further gain. As Lillian R. Klein writes, "Under the circumstances, the fact that the Levite stays beyond the conventional three days certainly imposes hardship upon the economics of the host family. The character of the Levite—that he is selfish and inconsiderate of others—emerges from his overstay."[320] He does not care for anyone else, no Other other than himself, and the poor woman's father does not have the sense to see it. In this way, the narrator also leads the reader to see the father as both a caring parent and a dope.

Accordingly, I agree with Fewell and Gunn who, like other scholars, compellingly argue that the Levite perpetrated some misdeed that led the woman, who herself did nothing wrong, to return to her father's home. They ask, "Would a woman who has actually committed adultery return to her father's house, given the social shame that this would bring upon him? By the same token, would the Levite, in such a case, be likely to go to the father to woo her ('speak to her heart') and bring her back? And why is there no mention of legal consequence (cf. Genesis

[319] Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 133.
[320] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 164.

38)?"[321] Given these questions, I agree with those commentators, like Ken Stone who, to use Gale Yee's phrase, read "וַתִּזְנֶה עָלָיו" "figuratively."[322] Stone argues

> [W]e are dealing with a cultural matrix [cultural repertoire] in which gender roles are sharply distinguished and in which the honor of a husband is partially contingent on the actions taken by or toward the women of his household. One of the assumptions of the honor-shame ideological complex is that a man's honor in the eyes of other men rests in part on his ability to control the women associated with his family. The 'control' in question is associated particularly with matters of sexual purity, and a woman's sexual conduct may in some cases reflect less upon her honor than upon the honor of her male kinsmen.[323]

If the woman rendered the Levite a cuckhold, she would have caused him tremendous humiliation, and the priest would have almost certainly sought to punish her according to the law to regain his control over her and end what he would have seen as a public disgrace.[324] That he does not punish her as Deuteronomy 22:21 requires instead suggests that the law does not apply in this case. As a result, it seems that the Levite's conduct drove his wife to leave. Accordingly, I follow the NJPS' translation of "וַתִּזְנֶה עָלָיו" as "deserted him" (Judg. 19:2).[325]

Why, then, does the author use √זנה as opposed to a different verb without these negative sexual connotations?[326] I suggest three possible reasons. First, the woman's desertion of the Levite constitutes an exceptional event in the Bible. As Ken Stone writes, "Now the Hebrew Bible places the initiative for ending a marital relation almost entirely upon the husband. Narratologically speaking, then, this woman is an acting subject in a way that is quite

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[321] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 133.
[322] Gale Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale Yee, 153 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). For similar comments, see Bohmbach, "Conventions/Contraventions," 91; Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 133; Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 37-38.
[323] Ken Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject-Honor, Object-Shame?," *JSOT* 67 (1995): 95.
[324] Ibid., 95-96. Cf. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 163.
[325] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 38.
[326] J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, JSOTSup. 163 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 179.

extraordinary within the bounds of the Hebrew Bible. It is possible that this unique initiative helps to account for the use of the root *znh* in the Masoretic Text."[327] Second, the writer may use this verb precisely because of its ambiguity. As both Stone and Lapsley note,[328] this author, for the most part, does not openly reveal his attitudes towards the narrative, characters, and events that unfold. Instead, the story employs understated rhetoric to signal "subtle but profound critical commentary on dominant cultural attitudes…through the voice of the narrator and by the way in which the narrative is constructed."[329] Lapsley offers that the use of √זנה functions in this way. It "opens the door to readerly speculation…The reader is confronted by ambiguous evidence that makes it difficult to form an easy judgment: is the woman to blame because she 'went whoring,' or is the Levite to blame because he drove his wife to leave him for some unstated reason? … [P]erhaps such ambiguity serves a different function: to dissuade the reader from attempting moral evaluations so early in the story."[330] Third and finally, the narrator use √זנה because the woman's desertion of her husband, in fact, metaphorically constituted unfaithfulness within the Israelite cultural repertoire. To recall Stone's earlier point, in ancient Israel, women's inappropriate conduct could diminish male relatives' honor. In Yee's words, "It is her very abandonment of her husband that the Deuteronomist describes as 'fornicating' against her husband."[331]

After departing from Bethlehem, the Levite, his attendant, two donkeys, and concubine reach "[10b]the vicinity of Jebus—that is, Jerusalem…[11]Since they were close to Jebus, and the day was very far spent, the attendant" suggests that they "spend the night" there (Judg. 10b-11), but

[327] Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19," 91.
[328] Ibid., 90; Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, chap. 3.
[329] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 36.
[330] Ibid., 38.
[331] Yee, "Ideological Criticism," 153.

the Levite rejects that proposal since he does not wish to stay in "a town of aliens who are not of Israel" (Judg. 19:14). Instead, he decides to continue forward to a place of "one's own kind," as Lapsley puts it.[332] "So they traveled on, and the sun set when they were near Gibeah of Benjamin" (Judg. 19:14).

The nameless woman's silence persists here. Yet, whereas the Levite continues to talk as before, the attendant speaks for the first and only time. "It is therefore significant that the idea [to stay the night in Jebus] comes from the otherwise silent servant."[333] The author of this story has the priest reject his attendant's suggestion precisely because it will have disastrous consequences, and the narrator stresses this point to further the reader's evaluation of the Levite.[334]

Instead of sleeping in Jebus, the woman, the Levite, his attendant, and two donkeys "turned off there and went in to spend the night in Gibeah" (Judg. 19:15). Thus, begins the author's use of what I call the *endangered hospitality motif* in contrast to the standard one used in Judges 19:3b-10a. The endangered hospitality motif contains eight literary stations. After (1) some unexpected guests arrive in town, (2) the host welcomes them, and (3) they enjoy his hospitality. At some point during their stay, (4) a mob of men demand to rape the guest(s) of the host, (5) who makes an offer to protect his male visitor(s). Yet, (6) the gang reject this proposition and thus occasions some sort of (7) reaction with lasting (8) consequences, for better or worse.

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[332] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 42.
[333] Ibid.
[334] Lapsley also draws attention to the Levite's characterization of Jebus as "a town of aliens who are not of Israel" (Judg. 19:14). That language, she argues, reveals a strong bias against non-Israelites, and by placing those words in the Levite's mouth, "the narrator gently guides the reader…to perceive the sectarian perspective…as suspect and dangerous. The idea, widely prevalent in the biblical traditions, that the in-group, the Israelites, is morally superior to the out-group, the Canaanites, is destabilized by the narrative." Ibid.

This motif also appears in Genesis 19 when the Sodomites demand to rape Lot's angelic guests. That story, in fact, shares an intertextual relationship with Judges 19:19:15-28 that Stuart Lasine characterizes as

> "one-sided" literary dependence. By 'literary dependence' I mean that Judges 19 presupposes the reader's awareness of Genesis 19 in its present form, and depends on that awareness in order to be properly understood. The dependence is 'one-sided' because the reader can fully understand the story of Lot's hospitality in Sodom without knowing the story of the Levite's concubine, whereas events described in Judges 19 must be viewed together with Genesis 19 for the intended contrast between the two situations to make the reader aware of the topsy-turvy nature of the "hospitality" in Gibeah.[335]

To highlight the differences noted by Lasine, I divide these stories into literary stations and arrange them side by side in the table below.

Literary Station # & Name	Genesis 19	Judges 19
# 1: Some Unexpected Guests Arrive in Town	[1a]The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom.	[15]They turned off there and went in to spend the night in Gibeah. He went and sat down in the town square, but nobody took them indoors to spend the night.
# 2: The Host Welcomes the Guests	[1b]When Lot saw them, he rose to greet them and, bowing low with his face to the ground, [2]he said, "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house to spend the night, and bathe your feet; then you may be on your way early." But they said, "No, we will spend the night [וְלִינ֥וּ] in the square." [3a]But he urged [וַיִּפְצַר] them strongly, so they turned his way and entered his house.	[16]In the evening, an old man came along from his property outside the town (This man hailed from the hill country of Ephraim and resided at Gibeah, where the townspeople were Benjaminites). [17]He happened to see the wayfarer in the town square. "Where," the old man inquired, "are you going to, and where do you come from?" [18] He replied, "We are traveling from Bethlehem in Judah to the other end of the hill country of Ephraim. That is where I live. I made a journey to

[335] Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 38-39.

		Bethlehem of Judah, and now I am on my way to the House of YHWH, and nobody has taken me indoors. [19]We have both bruised straw and feed for our donkeys, and bread and wine for me and your handmaid, and for the attendant with your servants. We lack nothing." [20]"Rest easy," said the old man. "Let me take care of all your needs. Do not on any account spend the night in the square." [21a]And he took him into his house.
# 3: The Guests Enjoy Hospitality	[3b]He prepared a feast for them and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. [4]They had not yet lain down,	[21b]He mixed fodder for the donkeys; then they bathed their feet and ate and drank. [22]While they were enjoying themselves,
# 4: A Mob of Men Demand to Rape the Host's Guest(s)	when the townspeople, the men of Sodom, young and old—all the people to the last man—gathered about the house. [5]And they shouted to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may be intimate with them."	the men of the town, a depraved lot, had gathered about the house and were pounding on the door. They called to the aged owner of the house, "Bring out the man who has come into your house, so that we can be intimate with him."
# 5: The Host Makes an Offer to Protect His Male Guest(s)	[6]So Lot went out to them to the entrance, shut the door behind him, [7]and said, "I beg you, my friends, do not commit such a wrong. [8]Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you please; but do not do anything to these men, since they have come under the shelter of my roof."	[23]The owner of the house went out and said to them, "Please, my friends, do not commit such a wrong. Since this man has entered my house, do not perpetrate this outrage. [24]Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. Let me bring them out to you. Have your pleasure of them, do what you like with them; but don't do that outrageous thing to this man."

# 6: The Mob Rejects the Host's Offer	[9]But they said, "Stand back! The fellow," they said, "came here as an alien, and already he acts the ruler! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." And they pressed [וַיִּפְצְרוּ] hard against the person of Lot, and moved forward to break the door.	[25]But the men would not listen to him,
#7: Reaction to the Mob's Rejection of the Host's Offer	[10]But the men stretched out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door.	so the man seized [וַיַּחֲזֵק] his concubine and pushed her out to them.
#8: Consequences of the Reaction to the Mob's Rejection of the Host's Offer	[11]And the people who were at the entrance of the house, young and old, they struck with blindness,[336] so that they were helpless to find the entrance.	They raped her and abused her all night long until morning; and they let her go when dawn broke. [26]Toward morning the woman came back; and as it was growing light, she collapsed at the entrance of the man's house where her husband was.

A brief glance at the first literary station reveals significant differences that distinguish the guests that visit Lot from those that arrive in Gibeah. The former, as Lot will discover, are angels; the latter, except for the two donkeys, are people.[337] In composing Judges 19, then, the author chose to replace angelic guests with human ones. According to Lasine, then, "Judges 19 uses Genesis 19 to show how hospitality is turned upside down when one's guests are not angels, and one lives in an age governed by human selfishness."[338]

Unlike the angels, the nameless woman, the Levite, and his attendant do not enjoy a hearty welcome. On the contrary, "nobody took them indoors to spend the night" (Judg. 19:15). This verse casts the Benjaminites in a highly negative light, for, according to custom, "they have

[336] The NJPS has "blinding light."
[337] Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 40.
[338] Ibid.

the responsibility to offer hospitality to strangers."[339] The travelers, then, must wait "in the town square [רְחוֹב]" (Judg. 19:15). The physical space that they occupy parallels both the gate of Sodom where Lot sat when he first saw the angels and their initial rejection of his hospitality in which they insist on "'spend[ing] the night in the square [רְחוֹב]'" (Gen. 19:2). According to Stein, "The gates of the city provided an open place where markets and courts of judgment were held and where the idle assembled. …The present allusion [in Judges 19:15] draws on the motif of the gate, and once more injustice begins in the place of justice."[340]

In the second literary station in Judges 19, "an old man…from the hill country of Ephraim" who happens to live in Gibeah comes along (Judg. 19:16); yet, even he disappoints, for unlike Lot or the priest's father-in-law, the old man interrogates the wayfarers rather than simply "offer…hospitality because they are there."[341] He asks for their provenance and destination, and the Levite answers truthfully, at least until he says, "[18]'I am on my way to the House of YHWH, and nobody has taken me indoors. [19]We have both bruised straw and feed for our donkeys, and bread and wine for me and your handmaid, and for the attendant with your servants. We lack nothing'" (Judg. 19:18-19). Until now, neither the narrator nor the Levite have made any mention of temple or shrine of any sort. The announcement of this religious destination "is a mere façade of piety."[342] Lapsley also significantly observes "a curious repetition" here.

> The Levite repeats nearly word for word to the old man something that the narrator had stated back in verse 15. In that earlier verse the narrator had noted that "there was no one to take them indoors," meaning the Levite, his wife, and

[339] Victor H. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Judges 4," *BTB* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 13. Matthews has the text in italics.
[340] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 166-167.
[341] Idem., *The Triumph of Irony*, 166.
[342] This sentence concludes, "offered for the consumption of the old man to make the Levite appear more sympathetic." Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 43. For similar comments, see Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 72. Cf. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19," *BTB* 22, no. 1 (1992): 8: "This sort of bribe has no place in the hospitality ritual. … I consider the Levite to be using sarcasm in 19:19, mixed with the polite speech expected of the stranger to his potential host."

> the servant. The Levite finishes explaining the situation to the old man by observing, "there was no one to take me indoors." Because the other words are identical in the Hebrew, the shift from "them" in the narrator's words to "me" in the Levite's speech is all the more striking. When this detail is noted, it reinforces the reader's impression that the Levite is one who cares more for himself than he does for those in his care.[343]

The Levite unknowingly betrays his selfishness to the reader. His self-centeredness, however, does not relieve the old man from a sense of responsibility to the priest and his fellow travelers. "[20]'Rest easy,' said the old man. 'Let me take care of all your needs. Do not on any account spend the night in the square.' [21]And he took him into his house" (Judg. 19:20-21). He continues to follow what Victor H. Matthews calls "the protocol of hospitality" when he provides feed for his guests' donkeys and lets them wash their feet, eat, and drink (Judg. 19:21b).

In the fourth literary station, a mob of men from Gibeah order the old man to send out the Levite for them to rape, and the Sodomites in Genesis 19:4-5 likewise demand to rape Lot's incognito angelic visitors. Why do both groups of men issue these abhorrent requests? Since neither narrative explains their motivation, Ben Stone promisingly turns to anthropological studies "of the Mediterranean basin and the Middle East" with a focus on the relationship between "sex and gender…honor and shame." In particular, he discusses what he calls the honor-shame complex, "a particular configuration of beliefs about sex, gender, honor and shame." I have already discussed one of these beliefs, namely how women's behavior can humiliate male family members.[344] He further notes how "societies in which the 'honor-shame' complex has been studied" exhibit an aversion for "male homosexuality." He explains:

> This negative evaluation is associated with the rigid differentiation between male and female gender roles, but also with the hierarchical nature of this differentiation. Masculinity is considered by the men of these cultures to be not

[343] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 43.
[344] Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19," 94-96.

> only different from femininity, but also superior to it. It is nearly always considered an insult to say that a man is acting like a woman. …
>
> Within this network of assumptions about gender, male homosexuality comes to assume a particular range of meaning. …Of the two men associated with homosexual intercourse, one of the men assumes a role that is, culturally speaking, allotted to the female gender alone. Stated another way, one male takes on the role of sexual object rather than sexual subject. Because the man who allows himself to be acted upon sexually shows himself to be the object of another man, he is 'feminized'. This man is without honor because he is, in a sense, no longer considered a man. The negative attitude toward male homosexuality can thus be seen within this framework as a function of gender hierarchy and differentiation. …
>
> Consequently, male homosexual contact serves metaphorically for other sorts of unequal male-male power relations. Sexual penetration signifies social submission. …precisely because sexual submission signifies, within this network of meaning, a 'feminine' role and, hence, the demasculinization of the man forced to take this role upon himself. By taking on the 'female' position, the man takes on a position associated with lower status and power. [345]

Rachel Adler similarly argues that sexual intercourse between two men "subverts Israelite notions of order and proper assignment of power: a man declasses another man. Someone socially assigned to a dominant role is forced to enact a subordinate role that degrades by feminizing."[346] In my own words, "Women get penetrated, not men, the penetrators."[347] Yet, in homosexual rape, the male rapist penetrates while the male victim gets penetrated. Homosexual rape challenges the raped male's "masculinity…and honor. The subject of the rape, the man who does the forcing, is thereby making a statement about the inability of the male object to emulate a certain socially-inscribed model of masculinity."[348] From this perspective, homosexual rape humiliatingly emasculates its victims. This principle suggests that both the Sodomite and Gibeahite men's interest in raping, respectively, the incognito angels and Levite stems not from

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[345] Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19," 96-97.
[346] Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 131.
[347] David Benjamin Bloom, "Evil in the Thought of Israel Salanter and Rachel Adler," *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (Winter 2019): 44.
[348] Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19," 99.

erotic desire but from a preoccupation with power. As Stone puts it, "The relation that the men of Gibeah wish to establish with the Levite is thus a relation of power (the men of Gibeah wish to express their power over the Levite) and honor (the men of Gibeah wish to bring dishonor and shame upon the Levite)." [349]

On the one hand, then, both Lot's and the old man's heinous offer make sense. Obligated "to protect his guest or the honour of his guest,"[350] both hosts seek to avert the worst: the homosexual rape of their visitors. Disgustingly, "it simply must be faced that the host, the Levite, and also, in Genesis 19, Lot, the one 'righteous man' in the city of Sodom, find women to be more acceptable objects of rape than men, and that this attitude is never condemned by the text."[351] On the other hand, "there is a world of difference between Lot's offer and the analogous offer of the resident-alien host in Gibeah," remarks Lasine. "It is one thing to offer one's daughter's to a mob in order to fulfill one's duties as host, and another to offer one's virgin daughter and the concubine of one's guest!" [352] Of course, "[t]he script calls for two women to be offered to the mob" since the author of Judges 19 modeled this scene after the parallel one in Genesis 19 where Lot offers his two daughters (v. 8).[353] Were the old man to have proposed only his daughter, the narrative would have less coherence with Genesis 19. That said, the number of substitute victims offered seems rather arbitrary since the band of men in both Genesis 19 and

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[349] Stone further adds:

> The insult constituted by their demand seems to be compounded within the narrative discourse by the fact that the message is not conveyed directly to the Levite, but rather indirectly by means of the host. The Levite is thus not only an object of the intended actions of the men of Gibeah, he is also an object of speech. The men of Gibeah do not speak to him, even by command, but rather speak about him to the host, who is implicitly given control over the disposal of the Levite's sexuality—exactly as men are often given control over sexual access to women. [Ibid]

[350] Julian Pitt-Rivers, "The Law of Hospitality," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 1 (2012): 516.
[351] Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19," 100.
[352] Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 39.
[353] Ibid.

Judges 19 reject the offer. Furthermore, they have no interest in raping these women; they want to emasculate the male guest(s).[354] Perhaps, then, Judges 19 does not exhibit a forced adaptation of the endangered hospitality motif. On the contrary, the author made the old man offer not only his daughter but also the Levite's concubine as way to impugn the host who "seems oblivious to the fact that his offer of the concubine is 'inhospitable'."[355] A proper host, according to this honor-shame complex, would have offered *only* his own daughter.

Neither the horde of Sodomite men nor that in Gibeah accepts the host's offer. Yet, whereas the angels in Genesis 19 rescue Lot and put a stop to the menacing Sodomites, the Levite in Judges 19 thrusts his concubine out to men who relentlessly gangrape her. In Genesis 19, the host and his guests emerge from the danger unharmed with violence done to the mob of men; in Judges 19, the host and the mob of men emerge unharmed with violence done to the nameless woman and the Levite guest, albeit in a different way as I will show.

The seizure and subsequent shoving of the woman form the first two acts of violence in this scene.[356] The verb √חזק in the hiphil (causative), here rendered as "seized" by the NJPS (Judg. 19:25), carries connotations of physical control, some coercive and even violent. For example, Deuteronomy 22:11-12 stipulates, "[11]If two men get into a fight with each other, and the wife of one comes up to save her husband from his antagonist and puts out her hand and seizes [וְהֶחֱזִיקָה] him by his genitals, [12]you shall cut off her hand; show no pity." David, hoping to gain Saul's permission to fight against Goliath, tells the king, "[34]'Your servant has been tending his father's sheep, and if a lion or a bear came and carried off an animal from the flock, [35]I would

[354] Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19," 100.
[355] Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 39.
[356] The woman suffers multiple acts of violence. One *might* identify the gang's demand, the host's offer—if overheard by his daughter and the nameless woman—and the Sodomites' "press[ing]…hard against the person of Lot" as acts of violence (Gen. 19:9).

go after it and fight it and rescue it from its mouth. And if it attacked me, I would seize [וְהֶחֱזַקְתִּי] it by the beard and strike it down and kill it'" (1 Sam. 17:35). Proverbs 26:17 advises:

> A passerby who gets embroiled in someone else's quarrel
> Is like one who seizes [מַחֲזִיק] a dog by its ears.

Of course, √חזק can and often does mean "grasp…keep hold of."[357] The context in Judges 19, however, overwhelmingly suggests that the Levite forcefully and coercively seizes and does away with his concubine like one would an attacker, enemy, or dog.

This violence has a clear preemptive function: the Levite shoves his wife out the door to avoid suffering rape himself. Unlike redemptive violence, where one resorts to violence to save others who have *already* suffered violence, preemptive violence precedes any other act of violence, for it works to prevent further acts of violence from ever transpiring at all. This absurd logic can only work, however, if the perpetrator values the would-be victims more than those whom s/he victimizes through preemptive violence. The Levite's deeds therefore reveal what the narrator has intimated all along: the priest cares only for himself and regards his concubine as property with which to pleasure himself and to do with as he likes or as the circumstances might "require." "Better that the men rape my concubine than me," he thinks.[358] And so, they do. Preemptive violence fulfills its function. The men indifferently rest in safety while a group of strange men brutally gangrape the nameless woman without rest.[359]

Enter the third and *at least* fourth acts of violence against her: the men's mercilessly gangraping her. I say *at least* because the narrator does not specify the number of perpetrators. Do three, four, or five men or perhaps ten or even twenty rape her? Given that "[t]hey raped her

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[357] *HALOT*, s. v. "חזק."
[358] For a similar comment, see Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19," 100.
[359] Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 44; Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 46-47.

and abused her all night long until morning" (Judg. 19:25), it seems that a great number of fiends participate in this monstrosity but to what end? After all, the men wished to rape the Levite not his wife, and since they did rape her, why did they not accept the host's offer? Put differently, why did the men first forego the opportunity to rape two women, the host's daughter and the Levite's concubine, and subsequently rape only the latter?

Once again, Stone offers some enlightening insight:

> Within the honor-shame complex it is not only a woman's conduct but also the conduct taken toward her that reflects upon the honor of the men thought to be responsible for her sexual purity. A sexual misconduct committed against a woman is, in one sense, an attack upon the man under whose authority she falls…Thus, although the men of Gibeah did not bring dishonor upon the Levite directly by raping him *as if he were a woman,* they nevertheless manage to challenge his honor in another way: *through his woman.*
>
> This intention explains why the offer of the daughter and the concubine together is rebuffed, whereas the offer of the concubine alone is accepted. The men of Gibeah are not interested in attacking the host, but rather his guest. In distinction from the men of Sodom in Genesis 19, the men of Gibeah never express any overt hostility toward the resident alien dwelling in their midst. The story turns upon the fact that they wish to humiliate the Levite instead. Thus, they are not interested in the host's daughter, whose rape would impact primarily the honor of the host, but they do accept the woman who 'belongs to' the Levite. The men of Gibeah still manage to inflict dishonor upon the Levite, and to do so in a sexual manner: *by way of* the concubine. [360]

Genesis 19 indirectly supports this interpretation. Wishing to dishonor Lot's guests, the Sodomites refuse to rape his daughters, for that sexual violence would only harm Lot. The mob of men must directly rape the disguised angels to humiliate them, for these divine visitors have no children. As Stone shows, within this honor-shame complex, the Levite endures violence as well, for the abhorrent sexual violence against the nameless woman inflicts humiliating violence on him. The men indirectly rape the Levite by directly raping his concubine. Even in rape, she is not the focus of attention.

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[360] Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19," 100.

After a night of unimaginable terror, the nameless woman surprisingly regains her agency—if one can use that term to describe her final freely yet desperately chosen act: "Toward morning the woman came back; and as it was growing light, she collapsed at the entrance of the man's house where her master [אֲדוֹנֶיהָ] was" (Judg. 19:26).[361] According to Lapsley, "Her voluntary return to the old man's house reveals how in extremis she is: she has nowhere else to go and she must return to those who cast her out."[362] Perhaps, then, one might better describe her decision to return as a choiceless choice rather than an act of agency. This verse supports this reading, for it calls her "the woman" instead of "his wife" or "his concubine" and the Levite her master.[363] Klein appropriately remarks, "This change of nomenclature emphasizes that the concubine is his slave…In his actions, the Levite has shown himself to be a master of a female slave, not a husband in a secondary kind of marriage; and the more accurate term subtly replaces the more honorific."[364] Through this shift, the discourse firmly locates the anonymous woman in a subject-position defined by its "objective" status and lack of power.[365]

Yet, the term, "the woman," has other implications as well, for "she is indisputably and tragically the subject only now, at the very end of her life, and is finally not defined by her relationships with the men who have abandoned her." Furthermore, the juxtaposition of "night…morning…dawn" and "morning…light" (Judg. 19:25-26) "add a tragic poetic quality to the language of the story," as they move the reader to what Dominick LaCapra calls "empathic

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[361] The NJPS uses "husband" instead of "master."
[362] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 46.
[363] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges,* 170; Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 46.
Koala Jones-Warsaw, "Toward a Womanist Hermeneutic: A Reading of Judges 19-21," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner, Feminist Companion to the Bible 4, p. 177, n. 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).
[364] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges,* 170.
[365] Jones-Warsaw, "Toward a Womanist Hermeneutic: A Reading of Judges 19-21," 177, n. 3.

unsettlement."[366] The narrator thereby reveals his own "care" for the poor woman as he stirs the reader to empathize with her as well.[367]

The narrator's compassion for the tortured woman starkly contrasts with the Levite's continued heartlessness: "[27]When her husband arose in the morning, he opened the doors of the house and went out to continue his journey; and there was the woman, his concubine, lying at the entrance of the house, with her hands on the threshold. [28]'Get up,' he said to her, 'let us go.' But there was no reply. So the man placed her on the donkey and set out for home" (Judg. 19:27-28). The Levite speaks to his concubine and acts as if nothing happened to her. He does not seek to comfort her, apologize for his unforgiveable behavior, or even attempt to explain himself. Indeed, he does not even look for her; he only happens to notice her by chance. "The text reads as though he intended to depart alone without regard for anyone else," Trible writes.[368] Both nothing and everything has changed for the woman. She remains a powerless object, one whose collapse at the door "embodies her servile position" and one for whom the Levite shows no concern whatsoever. Sadly, she must suffer one final cruelty at his hands.

With the closure of the endangered hospitality motif, Judges 19's intertextual relationship with Genesis 19 comes to an end, and a new one between Judges 19:29-20:1 and 1 Samuel 11:7 begins:[369]

Literary Stations	1 Samuel. 11:7	Judges 19:29-20:1
The Dismemberment	He took a yoke of oxen and cut them into pieces,	[29]When he came home, he took[370] [וַיִּקַּח] a knife, and

[366] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 46; Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Parralax: Re-visions of Culture and Society (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), chap. 1-2. The term, "empathic unsettlement," first appears in the preface, xxxi.
[367] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 46.
[368] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 78.
[369] My table, in the verses that it presents, draws directly from Edenburg, *Dismembering the Whole*, 221-222. I have added the literary stations.
[370] The NJPS has "picked up."

		seized[371] his concubine and cut her [וַיְנַתְּחָהּ] up limb by limb into twelve parts.
The Sending of Pieces	which he sent by messengers throughout the territory of Israel [וַיְשַׁלְּחֵהוּ בְּכָל־גְּבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל],	He sent them throughout the territory of Israel [וַיְשַׁלְּחֵהוּ בְּכֹלגְּבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל].
The Sender's Message	with the warning, "Thus shall be done to the cattle of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel into battle!"	
The Recipients React	Terror [פַּחַד] from YHWH fell upon the people,	[30]And everyone who saw it cried out, "Never has such a thing happened or been seen from the day the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt to this day! Put your mind to this; take counsel and decide."
An Army Assembles	and they marched forth[372] [ויצאו] as one man [אֶחָד כְּאִישׁ].	20 [1]Thereupon all the Israelites—from Dan to Beer-sheba and [from] the land of Gilead—marched forth [ויצאו], and the community assembled as one man[373] [כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד] before YHWH at Mizpah.

Cynthia Edenburg notes:

> Three striking expressions are shared by both texts. "To go forth as one man" (יצא כאיש אחד) occurs only in Judg 20:1 and 1 Sam 11:7. "Send throughout the borders [= territory] of Israel" (שלח בכל גבול ישראל) occurs only in Judg 19:29 and 1 Sam 11:3, 7, and its double occurrence in 1 Sam 11 suggests that it is firmly rooted in the story of Saul. The final striking parallel is the verb נתח, "to cut up" (Judg 19:29, 1 Sam 11:7). [374]

I shall discuss this third shared lexeme in greater depth later. For now, I need only say that the

[371] The NJPS has "took hold of."
[372] The NJPS has "came out."
[373] The NJPS has "to a man."
[374] Edenburg, *Dismembering the Whole*, 222. See also Milstein, "Saul the Levite and His Concubine:," 101.

the first two linguistic parallels, especially in light of their rarity, offer compelling evidence for intertextual influence. The question thus becomes: did 1 Samuel 11:7 influence Judges 19:29-20:1, or did 1 Samuel 11:7 influence Judges 19:29-20:1?

Three reasons suggest the former. First, 1 Samuel 11:7 has a tighter structure whereas that of Judges 19:29-20:1 has a looser one. Second, the absence of "The Sender's Message" literary station in Judges 19 begs the question, "How did the Israelites know to assemble at Mizpah simply by receiving dismembered pieces of the nameless woman?"[375] 1 Samuel 11:7 does not suffer from this problem because it has this crucial element to explain the symbolism behind the dismembered oxen. The third and perhaps most important reason concerns the verb, √נתח. Edenberg explains, "Elsewhere in the Bible this verb [נתח] is restricted to cultic contexts dealing with sacrificial offerings, and the object of the verb is invariably an animal (Exod 29:17; Lev 1:6, 12; 1 Kgs 18:23, 33), as it also is in 1 Sam 11:7 (oxen). The divinely inspired terror induced by Saul's step indicates that he was performing a cultic act as YHWH's agent."[376] Nothing remarkable characterizes √נתח in 1 Samuel 11:7. The verb does not stand out. "By contrast, the object of the verb נתח in Judg 19:29 is human rather than animal, and there is no indication that the action was performed in the name of YHWH. Instead, the concubine's husband acts on his own initiative as a private agent, and the shock of the people who viewed the dismembered body (Judg 19:30) indicates the extraordinary nature of the act."[377] The use of √נתח in Judges 19:29 is suis generis; this verb does not take a human being as its object anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. "Thus the use of the cult term נתח to describe cutting up the concubine's body deviates from the standard usage and may indicate that the Levite's actions are patterned

[375] Edenburg, *Dismembering the Whole*, 223.
[376] Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 42; Edenburg, *Dismembering the Whole*, 222.
[377] Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 42; Edenburg, *Dismembering the Whole*, 222.

upon those of Saul in 1 Sam 11:7, but with a dramatic twist: the concubine takes the place of Saul's oxen as sacrificial victim and without any divine ordinance."[378] These three reasons suggest that 1 Samuel 11:7 helped shape Judges 19:29-20:1.

The most important similarity shared by these two stories, of course, is not linguistic but subject oriented: both 1 Samuel 11:7 and Judges 19:29-20:1 utilize mustering violence, the very concept of which originates in the wider Levantine cultural repertoire. Indeed, Daniel Bodi shows that some ancient near eastern societies other than Israel also practiced mustering violence through dismemberment. The most significant parallel occurs in a letter from the ancient near eastern city of Mari. This document's similarities with 1 Samuel 11:7 and with Judges 19:29-20:1 do not demonstrate that the first text influenced the latter two; rather, they show that the notion of mustering violence formed a *mental representation*. That italicized phrase comes from Dan Sperber's model of communication in terms of "representations." "A representation," he writes, "sets up a relationship between at least three terms: that which represents, that which is represented, and the user of representation. A fourth term may be added when there is a producer of the representation distinct from its user. A representation may exist inside its user: it then becomes a *mental representation*."[379] Thus, when a diner informs his/her waiter, "I'd like the chocolate cake *à la mode*," the server perfectly understands that his/her customer wants the chocolate cake with ice cream on top because they share the same mental representation of *à la mode*. However, when this American diner travels to France and, with a perfect French accent, tells his/her waiter, « Je voudrais le gâteau chocolat à la mode », the server does not fully comprehend the patron's request, for his/her mental representation of *à la mode* (*in fashion* in

[378] Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 42; Edenburg, *Dismembering the Whole*, 222.
[379] Dan Sperber, *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 32.

French) significantly departs from that of the American. Sperber does not restrict mental representations to linguistic signs. They also include "memor[ies]… belief[s]… intention[s]" and more.[380] In this case, then, mustering violence formed a mental representation that populated the ancient near eastern cultural repertoire that not only long preceded but also eventually influenced the writing of both 1 Samuel 11:7 and Judges 19.

In *Archives Royales de Mari* [*ARM*] II 48, "Baḫdī-Līm, a high official of Zimrī-Līm[, King of Mari,] has difficulties in levying troops among the Ḫanean semi-nomadic tribes for his warlord. In order to summon the recalcitrant nomadic tribes,"[381] Baḫdī-Līm makes the following suggestion:

> 13. And if in three days they (still) don't get together,
> 14. now, if my lord agrees
> 15. let them kill a criminal in the workhouse
> 16. let them cut his head off
> 17. and between the town,
> 18. up to Ḫudnum and Appān,
> 19. let them tour in order that the troops may become fearful
> 20. and quickly gather here
> 21. (so that) according to the urgent order
> 22. which my lord gave me,
> 23. rapidly the military campaign
> 24. I may expedite.[382]

Bodi comments:

> The meaning of the rite described in *ARM* II 48 is captured in the key term *palāḫum* which is usually translated with 'to fear,' or 'to respect.' …[T]he goal of this rite seems to be to provoke fear, to strike the imagination and bring the troops to obedience …Similarly in 1 Sam. 11:7, the biblical text describes the effect of this rite, rendered in Hebrew with a very strong expression: paḥad-yhwh 'Yahweh's terror.' … Yahweh's fear falls upon members of other Hebrew tribes

[380] Ibid.
[381] Daniel Bodi, "The Mustering of Tribes for Battle in 1 Samuel 11 and in *ARM* II 48 and the Donkey as the Hebrew Royal Symbol in Light of Amorite Customs," *Revue internationale d'histoire militaire ancienne*, no. 5 (2017): 10.
[382] *Archives Royal de Mari* II 48, trans. Bodi in his "The Mustering of Tribes for Battle," 11.

> motivating them to accept Saul's leadership and to join him in the battle against the Ammonite king.[383]

Bodi highlights an important aspect of mustering violence, namely its utilization of fear. Baḫdī-Līm suggests that they sever the imprisoned fellow's head to brandish it as symbolic threat that the tarrying Ḫaneans would suffer the same fate should they not heed their king's call.[384] Just as this course of action serves "to provoke fear, to strike the imagination and bring the troops to obedience,"[385] so too "[t]error [פַּחַד] from YHWH fell upon the people [the Israelites]" when Saul's messengers explained the significance of the dismembered oxen (1 Sam. 11:7).[386] The use of fear to raise an army constitutes one of the defining features of mustering violence. Strictly speaking, then, mustering violence in and of itself is a form of psychological violence. This classification matters because it reveals an obvious and thus easily overlooked but nonetheless highly significant point: dismemberment constitutes a separate act of gross violence that precedes and, in fact, facilitates mustering violence.

ARM II 48's and 1 Samuel 11:7's depictions of mustering violence also connect kingship with divinity. To requote Bodi:

> The meaning of the rite described in *ARM* II 48 is captured in the key term *palāḫum* which is usually translated with 'to fear,' or 'to respect.' However, it also implies the fear of violating a taboo, to offend a divinity or the sovereign.[387] The rite of cutting a man's head and displaying it to the tribes is a warning of highest importance, meaning that if they do not respond to the levy and gather for battle, they would be offending their sovereign Zimrī-Līm, denying him due respect as the supreme tribal chieftain. [388]

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[383] Bodi, "The Mustering of Tribes for Battle," 14.
[384] Ibid., 9.
[385] Ibid., 14.
[386] Ibid.
[387] Here, ibid., cites André Finet, "Sacrifice d'alliance dans le Proche-Orient ancien," *Anthropozoologica* 3 (1989): 55.
[388] Bodi, "The Mustering of Tribes for Battle," 14.

Although Bodi flattens the polysemy of *palāḫum* in favor of an offense against a human ruler—in his interpretation, were the Ḫaneans' to dismiss Zimrī-Līm's call, they would be insulting only their king—he earlier remarks how the *Epic of Zimrī-Līm* stresses that the gods accompanied the king in war: "'(The storm god) Addu will go at his [Zimrī-Līm's] left, Erra the impetuous one, at his right.'[389] The elusiveness of demarcations between humans and gods is a hallmark of war conduct in the ancient Near East and in ancient Israel, or as C.J. Gadd put it, 'The wars were the god's wars and the king his general [sic].'"[390] Clearly, Bodi believes that the Mari documents associate Zimrī-Līm with the god(s). Following this line of thought, I therefore retain *palāḫum*'s polysemy to suggest that the Ḫaneans' disobedience would insult not only Zimrī-Līm but also Dagan, the god of wheat, who had enthroned him as their king. Likewise, Sigmund Mowinckel likewise argues that the "king" of "Israel was at the same time the representative of God before the people and of the people before God."[391] Reflecting this insight, the narrator in 1 Samuel 11 reports that when Saul learned of the Israelites' predicament under Nahash, "the spirit of *God* gripped" him," and "[t]error [פַּחַד] from *YHWH* fell upon the people [the Israelites]" when they understood the threat symbolically conveyed by the dismembered oxen (vv. 6-7, emphasis added).[392] God inspires Saul, a human king, to use mustering violence, which the Israelites regard as of divine provenance. The association between, on the one hand, Zimrī-Līm and the deities, and, on the other hand, Saul and YHWH, suggests some sort of identity between the king

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[389] Citing Michaël Guichard, "Les aspects religieux de la guerre à Mari," *Revue d'Assyriologie* 93 (1999): 36; and idem., *Florilegium Marianum 14: L'Épopée de Zimrī-Līm*, Mémoires de Nabu 16 (Paris: Société pour l'Étude du Proche-Orient Ancien, 2014), 22, Bodi presumably translates the French rendering of Akkadian into English in his "The Mustering of Tribes for Battle," 9.

[390] Bodi, "The Mustering of Tribes for Battle," 9, misquotes Gadd who writes, "The wars were the god's wars, the king his general." C. J. Gadd, *Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient Near East*, The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy, 1945 (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 62.

[391] Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalm's in Israel's Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas, 2 vols. in 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company / Dearborn, MI: Dove Booksellers, 2004), 224.

[392] Bodi, "The Mustering of Tribes for Battle," 14.

and the god(s). Accordingly, these two accounts seem to exhibit the same stratification of power examined in chapter 4. This insight sheds further light on the efficacy of mustering of violence. Were the Ḫaneans to reject Zimrī-Līm's call, they would, in effect, disobey the gods as well. These nomads would lose their heads were they not to get them straight first by fulfilling their duties to Zimrī-Līm. Similarly, were the Israelites not to answer Saul's summons, then, "[h]e would be denied respect as the supreme tribal leader and in so doing they would disrespect Yhwh under whose patronage he was chosen and anointed."[393] Within the logic of the stratification of power, disobedience of the earthly king amounts to defiance of the heavenly king(s). The sovereign power with which Zimri-Lim could and Saul, in fact, does wield mustering violence is dangerous because it flows from an unquestionable divine source.

Despite these similarities, *ARM* II 48 bears closer affinity with Judges 19:29-20:1, for both texts, unlike 1 Samuel 11:7, feature the dismemberment of a human being as opposed to oxen. Of course, *ARM* II 48 constitutes the only document from Mari that depicts mustering violence. Other ancient texts, either no longer extant or still awaiting discovery, may show that kings and those connected with them also dismembered goat, sheep, and oxen in mustering violence. Some scholars may even argue, "We already have such evidence in 1 Samuel 11:7!" They might bolster this claim with reference to two Hittite texts. The first, *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi* [Cuneiform documents from Boghazköi] (*KUB*) XVIII 28 IV 45-56, speaks of a sacrificial ritual that soldiers should perform "[w]hen the troupes are beaten by the enemy." By bisecting alive "a man, a billy goat, a puppy, and a piglet," setting the halves opposite each other, constructing a wooden "gate," lighting two fires in front of it, "pass[ing] through the" dismembered remains and gateway, and then performing some subsequent rituals upon reaching

[393] Bodi, "The Mustering of Tribes for Battle," 14.

a river, the defeated army achieves some sort of "lustration."[394] The second, *KUB* XVII 17 9-10, reads: "… a throne (?)…….a bullock […] a prisoner, a piglet, a puppy, two jugs{?}.[395] Although this document offers precious little context because of its fragmentary condition, the mention of "a prisoner," according to Olivier Masson, suggests that the text refers to some sort of "military ritual."[396] Maximalists might contend that these Hittite documents demonstrate that Saul's dismemberment of oxen evidences familiarity with the practice of dismembering animals in military settings similar to those depicted in these Hittite texts.

Why, then, does Judges 19 feature the dismemberment of a human being? According to Masson, "the human victim was reserved for grave cases, in particularly solemn circumstances."[397] Following this logic, Bodi contends, "By dismembering his concubine and sending pieces to various tribes, the Levite was calling attention to the exceptional nature of this rite and the supreme value of the sacrifice. A human sacrifice is far more valuable than that of oxen."[398] Yet, Bodi misses the irony. The Levite should not be dismembering a human being because the occasion does not call for it. In making this statement, I do not mean to diminish the gravity or heinousness of rape. I mean only to suggest that within the larger socio-political scheme of things, the launching of war to avenge one *insignificant* man's honor exemplifies absurdity and verges on the border of impossibility. It would only happen in a topsy-turvy world, and that is precisely the point This gangrape, not to mention the dismemberment, is indeed an

[394] The words in quotations come from Bodi's translation of J. Friedrich's French translation. The assumption that this accomplishes a lustration comes from Olivier Masson, "À propos d'un rituel hittite pour la lustration d'une armée: le rite de passage entre les deux parties d'une victime," *Revue d'Histoire Religieuse* 137 (1950): 7, doi:https://doi.org/10.3406/rhr.1950.5699.
[395] The English translation of J. Friedrich's French translation is mine. The French occurs in ibid., 8, doi:https://doi.org/10.3406/rhr.1950.5699. I have added the question mark in the braces.
[396] Ibid.,: 9. Again, the English translation is mine.
[397] Ibid., 22, doi:https://doi.org/10.3406/rhr.1950.5699.
[398] Bodi, "The Mustering of Tribes for Battle," 15.

egregious, depraved, and unconscionable act, but it would never start a war. Comparison with 1 Samuel 11 demonstrates this point: Saul launches war to save the Israelites; the Levite to wreak vengeance and regain lost pride.[399]

Unfortunately, the first part of this argument employs fallacious reasoning, for the dismemberment of a human being can only have special significance if the perpetrator of mustering violence also had the option of dismembering animals. Although *KUB* XVIII 28 IV 45-56 and *KUB* XVII 17 9-10 do depict the dismemberment of animals, the violence done to them occurs within a completely different context. Here, purificatory violence, *not* mustering violence, requires the dismemberment of animals. These two documents do not explain why Saul dismembers oxen to summon his army. His choice of victim has no precedent in the extant ancient near eastern sources and therefore remains somewhat inexplicable. By contrast, *ARM* II 48 demonstrates that mustering violence requires the dismemberment of *Homo sapiens*, never other animals. The humanity of the dismembered woman does not render the Levite's horrific deed extraordinary but horrifically ordinary.[400]

Still, the Levite does not escape unscathed from any criticism, for he takes this horrific course of action "without any divine ordinance."[401] In *ARM* II 48, an *official* of the *king* proposes to behead a male prisoner, and, likewise, in 1 Samuel 11:7, the *king* himself dismembers some oxen. Baḫdī-Līm, as the official of the divinely chosen king,[402] and Saul as the king himself, enjoy intimate relationships with kingship and divinity. Baḫdī-Līm does not act without the king's permission, and Saul acts only because "the spirit of God gripped [him]…and his anger

[399] Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 37.
[400] Bodi, "The Mustering of Tribes for Battle," 25.
[401] Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 42; Cynthia Edenburg, *Dismembering the Whole*, 222.
[402] Daniel I. Block, *How I Love Your Torah, O LORD!: Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 124.

blazed up. The former's proposal to enlist and the latter's perpetration of mustering violence through dismemberment therefore comes from a position of human and divine power and legitimacy.

By contrast, despite his elite caste, the Levite does not enjoy the same political status. Since he has no connection to any shrine—that is, as long as one views his statement in Judges 19:18 as religious affectation to curry favor with the old man—he does not enjoy the wider community's economic support or religious esteem.[403] Without divine inspiration or seeking consultation from the wider community, the Levite, the most marginal of men in this narrative, executes mustering violence from a place of weakness and illegitimacy. He does not have the prerogative to dismember his wife. Judges 19:30 suggests that no one has that right, for the Israelites react not with terror—as they do at the dismembered oxen through which Saul symbolically threatens them in 1 Samuel 11—but with horror:[404] "'Never has such a thing

[403] This sentence concludes, "offered for the consumption of the old man to make the Levite appear more sympathetic." Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 43. For similar comments, see Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 72. Cf. Victor H. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19," 8: "This sort of bribe has no place in the hospitality ritual. … I consider the Levite to be using sarcasm in 19:19, mixed with the polite speech expected of the stranger to his potential host."

[404] If they respond with such outrage, why, then, do they aid the Levite? Unlike the Ḫaneans, the Israelites in the Book of Judges have no king to declare war. Instead, the tribal representatives must jointly decide whether to go to war. Indeed, the subsequent scene in Judges 20 demonstrates this point since they gather at Mizpah to learn of the circumstances that led the Levite to dismember nameless woman. Only after the priest tells them an alternative account of what happened do they then agree to go to war. They help the Levite not because they care about the torture and death of the nameless woman but because the violence that the priest suffered outrages them and, in their eyes, demands retribution.

Some scholars interpret the Israelites' revulsion as a response not to her dismemberment but to the Benjaminites' having dishonored the Levite by raping his concubine. I disagree with this reading because the Levite does not send messengers, as Saul does, to explain the significance of the dismembered human body. Without such a message, the Israelites cannot possibly know that the Benjaminites raped the woman.

This point raises another difficulty. How do the Israelites know to assemble as one army without instructions from the Levite? *ARM* II 48 offers some help in this regard, for although it speaks of an anonymous group of people responsible for killing the prisoner, beheading him, and then parading his head before the Ḫaneans, it does not mention any explanation whatsoever let alone one akin to that in 1 Samuel 11:7: "'Thus shall be done to the cattle of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel into battle!'" The absence of such a message in *ARM* II 48 suggests that the Ḫaneans implicitly understood the severed head's significance because they knew the cultural repertoire. Perhaps through past experience or their familiarity with the wider ancient neasr eastern cultural repertoire, they already had in their heads the mental representation that kings could muster soldiers by parading dismembered heads, and possibly other body parts. Baḫdī-Līm did not intend to send a message to accompany the

happened or been seen from the day the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt to this day!'" Although the Israelites speak these words, the narrator issues the critique. Without a proper leader, the Israelites have become depraved practitioners of abhorrent violence.

Horrified, the Israelites assemble at Mizpah where they demand an explanation from the Levite. He tells them, [4]"'**My** concubine and **I** came to Gibeah of Benjamin to spend the night. [5]The citizens of Gibeah set out to harm **me**. They gathered against **me** around the house in the night; they meant to kill **me**, and they ravished **my** concubine until she died. [6]So **I** took hold of **my** concubine and **I** cut her in pieces and sent them through every part of Israel's territory'" (Judg. 20:4-6, emphasis added). The Levite's account significantly departs from how the incident truly unfolded. First, although the residents of Gibeah did try to harm the Levite,[405] they did not intend to kill the priest.[406] Second, he conveniently fails to mention that he shoved the poor woman out the door to the throng of men "to save himself" and thereby omits any information that would implicate him in the gangbang and slaughter.[407] "If the Levite had been totally

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head because he had no need to do so. For the same reason, the Levite does not send a letter to the Israelites. They already know that human dismemberment calls for soldiers to assemble.[*]

If familiar with mustering violence through dismemberment, why do the Israelites exclaim, "'Never has such a thing happened or been seen from the day the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt to this day! Put your mind to this; take counsel and decide'" (Judg. 19:30)? Here, I suggest that the author's goals, unbeknownst to him, conflicted with the storyline that he composed. He placed his own condemnation of dismemberment and mustering violence in the mouths of the Israelites without realizing that that condemnation suggests that they, in fact, have not seen mustering violence at all.

[*]Why, then, does Saul send emissaries? I do not have a good answer to this question. The author of the former story may have lacked familiarity with the tradition evidenced in *ARM* II 42, known an alternative one that includes envoys, or simply thought it necessary to include messengers in his story since he found their absence awkward.

[405] By "harm," I refer to their intent to rape him, a point that the Levite also omits, as noted by Susan Niditch. She suggests, "There may be some uncomfortableness in the tradition about re-emphasizing the homosexual aspect of the attack. Could the narrator be so sensitive as to have his main character uncomfortable about disclosing the true nature of the event—the fact that he substituted her for himself and so on? I believe so. The style of repetition continues in chap. 20 (see below); its absence at this point is notable." Susan Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19-20: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration," *CBQ* 44, no. 3 (July 1982): 371.

[406] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 177; Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 51.
Cf. Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 49.

[407] Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 49; Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 51.

honest," Lasine writes, "the assembly might not have been so eager to arise 'as one man' (20.1, 8, 11; cf. 1 Sam. 11.7) in order to avenge the 'lewdness and wantonness' committed against this one man."[408] The author purposely writes these discrepancies into the story to guide the reader to recognize the Levite's complicity in the woman's fate and in the violence yet to come.[409]

First-person singular inflections mark eleven of the forty-two Hebrew words in the priest's report of the incident at Gibeah. This number sharply contrasts with the four mentions of the woman.[410] According to Lapsley:

> The repetition of "me" and "my" reveals the self-serving nature of the Levite's account, and accurately reflects his character as we have come to know it. The awkward grammar of "they surrounded against me the house" reflects the depth of the Levite's self-centeredness. A more accurate and grammatical account would be: "they surrounded the house" but the Levite feels compelled to insert himself into danger yet again. The "me" language crops up even where it is grammatically intrusive.[411]

Lasine, who also comments on this phenomenon, argues that this repeated use of first-person singular language not only belies the Levite's true character but also blames him for "the ensuing carnage…While the 'facts' reported by the Levite in Judges 20 are not consistent with Judges 19 the character of the Levite revealed through his speech is totally harmonious with the preceding chapter. He remains totally self-absorbed and indifferent to the woman who was murdered because he threw her to the mob in order to save himself."[412]

As soon as the Levite finishes speaking, "all the people rose, as one man" (Judg. 20:8) and pledged both their allegiance to the priest's cause and men to fight against the Benjaminites. The readiness with which the Israelites accept the Levite's testimony reveals their ineptitude and

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[408] Ibid., 49.
[409] Ibid., 48-49.
[410] Cf. ibid., 49, who observes only three mentions. He misses "'הָאִשָּׁה'" in Judges 20:4.
[411] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 51. Similarly see, Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 49.
[412] Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19," 49.

lack of qualifications to serves as judges, for they "fail to perceive the lack of a causal relationship between the given 'intent to kill' and the act of 'humbling [עִנָּה],'" Klein remarks. "It seems evident that anyone in a position to 'judge' would naturally ask how the primary intent (to kill the Levite) was transformed into 'humbling' the concubine. That the question is never put to the Levite condemns the judge as well as the judgment." The narrator has little regard for not only the Levite but also the Israelites as a whole.[413]

Before engaging in warfare, "all the men of Israel, united as one man, massed against the town" (Judg. 20:11) and demanded that the Benjaminites "'hand over those scoundrels in Gibeah so that we may put them to death and stamp out the evil from Israel.' But the Benjaminites would not yield to the demand of their fellow Israelites" (Judg. 20:13). At this point, the narratorial repetition of the phrase, "as one man," bears mentioning. Lapsley writes:

> The book that has depicted the chaotic disorganization of the tribes, and that has been pointing toward a time when the tribes would be unified (so the oft-perceived promonarchic bias, especially of the later chapters), now presents the tribes unified—except, crucially, for Benjamin. And that exception is the root of the irony in the repetitions of "as one man": the unity evoked by this phrase leads to the worst violence yet in Judges and to a civil war that further wounds and fractures Israel. It is a bogus unity that renders real unity even more remote.[414]

The narrator, then, does not regard this get-together as the idealized unity for which the Book of Judges pines. On the contrary, the Israelites are perhaps farther from achieving that union than ever before.

Of course, not all the blame rests with these tribes. The Benjaminites also share some responsibility. Although only a *group* of Benjaminites threatened the Levite and gangraped and killed the nameless woman, the entire community becomes at fault when they refuse to deliver

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[413] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 177.
[414] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 52.

those guilty individuals to the Israelites, whom the narrator describes as "their [the Benjaminites] fellow [lit. brother] Israelites [אחיהֶם בני־יִשׂרָאֵל]" (Judg. 20:13). According to Lapsley, that "use of" familial language "underscores the unfulfilled responsibility of the Benjaminites to bring the perpetrators to justice as a violation of kinship. Their insularity, their privileging of their own tribe above their responsibility to the larger group, despite evident wrongdoing, does not escape the narrator's judgment."[415]

Since the Benjaminites do not hand over the guilty party, they must face their Israelite brethren in war. Despite vastly superior numbers, the Israelites suffer dramatic losses of life; indeed, they only vanquish the Benjaminites in the third and only successful Israelite battle. Prior to each skirmish, the Israelites seek God's counsel and receive a reply. Before the first battle, "[18][t]hey proceeded to Bethel and inquired of God; the Israelites asked, 'Who of us shall advance first to fight the Benjaminites?' And YHWH replied, 'Judah first.' [19]So the Israelites arose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah" (Judg. 20:18-19). Before the second clash, "[t]hey had inquired of YHWH, 'Shall we again join battle with our kinsmen the Benjaminites?' And YHWH had replied, 'March against them'" (Judg. 19:23). In each of these cases, the Israelites, in Edith T. A. Davidson's words, "assumed too much—that they should fight, and naturally against the Benjaminites."[416] That is to say, they do not, in fact, ask God whether they should go to war in the first place. Only after "weeping before YHWH," "fast[ing]…and present[ing]…burnt offering and offerings of well-being to YHWH" do they ask God, "'Shall we again take the field against our kinsmen the Benjaminites, or shall we not?' YHWH answered, 'Go up, for tomorrow

[415] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 52-53.
[416] Edith T. A. Davidson, "The Carnivalesque-Grotesque in the Story of the Levite's Concubine in *Judges* 19-21," (paper, SBL Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, November 2008), 5, http://home.nwciowa.edu/wacome/carnivalrev.pdf; Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, 178.

I will deliver them into your hands'" (Judg. 20:26, 28). Here, the Israelites do not "presume Yahweh's prerogative to judge. …The text suggests that Yahweh intentionally allows Israel to lose two battle. …Only when a humbled Israel appeals to Yahweh do the goals of Israel and Yahweh…coincide."[417] As a result, the Israelites thrashed their familial foe, "put the whole town [of Gibeah] to the sword" (Judg. 20:37), and left only six hundred Benjaminite men alive (Judg. 20:47). In short, the Israelites execute a nearly complete genocide of the Benjaminites.

When the Israelites realize that they have virtually wiped out one of their constitutive twelve tribes, they lament "'that one tribe must now be missing from Israel'" (Judg. 21:6). Having vowed not to marry their daughters to the remaining Benjaminite men, the Israelites secure wives for their brethren elsewhere. Since they also swore to kill "'anyone from the tribes of Israel who did not'" join them at Mizpah (Judg. 21:8), they accordingly slaughter almost all of the residents of Jabesh-gilead for not assembling but "spare" four hundred virgins whom they give to the Benjaminites, who themselves take two hundred more women from Shiloh. In this way, the six hundred remaining Benjaminite men abduct six hundred women to perpetuate the tribe. The "circle" of violence reaches completion.[418] Trible remarks:

> Entrusted to Israelite men, the story of the concubine justifies the expansion of violence against women. …They have captured, betrayed, raped, and scattered four hundred virgins of Jabesh-gilead and two hundred daughters of Shiloh. Furthermore, they have tortured and murdered all the women of Benjamin and all the married women of Jabesh-gilead. Israelite males have dismembered the corporate body of Israelite females. Inasmuch as men have done it unto one of the least of women, they have done it unto many.[419]

In addition to the literal and figurative dismemberment of, respectively, the nameless woman and the women at Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh, the Israelite men have metaphorically dismembered

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[417] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, 178-179.
[418] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 137.
[419] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 83-84.

themselves as well: "[23]Then they went back to their own territory, and rebuilt their towns and settled in them. [24]Thereupon the Israelites dispersed, each to his own tribe and clan; everyone departed for his own territory" (Judg. 21:23-24). The Israelites never really united; they came together solely to avenge the Levite's honor. Having accomplished that goal, they disband into their respective tribes and allotted land, more isolated from each other than before. As Lapsley writes, "The coalition of Israelites does not in the end bring the tribes together, but pulls them apart."[420] Israel is its own worst enemy, and violence and vengeance are its autoimmune disease. Israel dismembers itself.

The narrative ends in the same way that it first began: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did as he pleased" (Judg. 21:35). With the first independent clause, the narrator implicitly suggests that had there been a king, the gangrape and dismemberment of the nameless woman, the decimating war between the Benjaminites and the rest of the Israelites, and the subsequent destruction of Jabesh-gilead and abduction of its women and those from Shiloh would not have come to pass. With a king, everyone would not have done as they pleased but as the sovereign, both human and divine, would have commanded them. "By the end of this story," Frymer-Kensky writes, "the readers are ready to add their voices to the chorus of Israel's elders who said to Samuel, 'Give us a king to rule us' (1 Sam. 8:5). The king will save Israel!"[421]

A Lévinassian Ethics of Reading: Deafening the I to the Cry of the Other

Subjectivity preoccupies the thought of both Foucault and Lévinas but in radically disparate ways. Whereas the former sees the self as the product of a complex set of interacting power structures, the latter defines the subject in terms of his/her responsibility to and for the

[420] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 63.
[421] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 137-138.

Other. For this reason, Levinas' writing evidences very little sustained engagement with power as such. What, if anything, does Lévinas contribute to my argument that the discourse around marriage and sexuality in Judges 19 disempowers the nameless woman?

As I have said, the face-to-face rarely occurs. That none of the people who encounter the anonymous woman respond to her face, then, is tragic but not unexpected. That said, I argue that the discourse around marriage and sexuality in Judges 19 renders the possibility of someone seeing her face even more unlikely, for this discourse, by disempowering her, also deafens the I—all those around her—to her face's cry for help. Put differently, the I cannot respond unless it sees the face, and this seeing requires a modicum of power to flow through the subject-position of the Other. The Levite's concubine does not enjoy this privilege. She never speaks: she has no voice whatsoever. Indeed, she does not even plea for mercy from the Benjaminite rapists or the despicable Levite. If she at least had had a voice, the men who victimize her might have heard her cry. If so, like the woman who gave the Nazi some bread in *Life and Fate*, they would have had no choice but to respond to her face.

Conclusion and Implications

In this chapter, I claimed that the narrator/author of Judges 19-21 seizes upon the moral depravity and chaos in this narrative as an opportunity to promulgate Israelite kingship. This argument explains why the narrative depicts the Levite as a heartless, self-absorbed character with no concern for anyone other than himself; the Benjaminites as fiends intent on dishonoring a priest; and the Israelites as incapable judges who, in their quest for vengeance, nearly destroy their brethren only to realize their misdeeds and commit further ones by capturing blameless women to perpetuate the Benjaminite tribe. By framing the entire sequence of horrific event between the remark, "there was no king in Israel" (Judg. 19:1; 21:25), the narrator not so

implicitly suggests that only a king will put a stop to such violence. Through this story, the author hopes to convey a similar message to his compatriots in the postexilic period: if the people continue on their current path of factiousness, Israel will dismember itself. In this way, the writer not only issues a stern warning but also calls for the establishment of some form of strong, centralized Israelite leadership in the Second Temple Period.

I also argued that the discourse around marriage and sexuality in Judges 19 not only disempowers but also objectifies the anonymous woman such that the men in this narrative, except for her father, do not see her as a person: they inflict merciless violence on her because objects cannot feel pain. Yet, she is a person; the discourse objectifies her only because it assigns her to a subject position—a woman, a concubine, a wife, a daughter, someone whose rape though undesired is preferable to that of the Levite—through which a minimum of power flows. Powerless, she cannot even raise her head as she desperately crawls to the door of the house "where her own lord cast her out."[422] Her powerlessness occludes her face such that no one can ever hear her cry, what Lévinas calls "the tears that a civil servant cannot see."[423] The widespread media attention to the predominantly Caucasian student survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in contrast to the inattention to the more numerous and more frequent shootings of people of color demonstrates this point.[424] This insight yields a

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[422] Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 46-47.

[423] Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Height" (1962), trans. Simon Critchley with Tina Chanter and Nicholas Walker, in *BPW*, 23.

[424] At this point, I move from a critical-historical reading to an epireading like that of Martha C. Nussbaum (Ceuppens, "Transcripts: An Ethics of Representation in *The Emigrants*," in *W. G. Sebald: History, Memory, Trauma*, ed. Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh, 260 [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006].). She focuses on fiction's potential as a domain for "ethical theorizing." Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 10. Like Aristotle, she believes that literature "is deep and conducive to our inquiry about how to live because it does not simply…record that this or that even happened; it searches for patterns of possibility—of choice and circumstance, and the interaction between choice and circumstance—that turn up in human lives with such a persistence that they must be regarded as *our* possibilities."[424] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 181.

highly significant and relevant implication for today. Politics cannot be just if it disempowers, obfuscates, and silences the disenfranchised. If politics translates ethics into the everyday world to the extent that the justice, which it administers, attends to the particular face of the third party, then, as Annabel Herzog writes: "The state…should be established *for* the sake of those who do not, or cannot, fight for their being, those who are defeated and cannot send representatives. …The legitimacy of politics should not consist in its relation to its participants but, on the contrary, in its responsibility for…its *absentees*."[425] This ethics of reading calls for restructuring politics around and in service to the third party, to people like the nameless woman, whose face receives no representation. When disadvantaged people come to occupy subject positions through which more power flows, their faces will speak and those who are most well off will have to respond.

[425] Annabel Herzog, "Is Liberalism 'All We Need'?: Lévinas's Politics of Surplus," *Political Theory* 30, no. 2 (April 2002): 218.

CONCLUSION

> Responsibility goes beyond being. In sincerity, in frankness, in the veracity of this Saying, in the uncoveredness of suffering, being is altered. But this saying remain, in its activity, a passivity; more passive than all passivity, for it is a sacrifice without reserve, without holding back, and therefore nonvoluntary—the sacrifice of a hostage designated who has not chosen himself to be hostage, but, possibly, elected by the Good, in an involuntary election not assumed by the elected one. For the Good cannot enter into a present or be put into a representation. But being God it redeems the violence of its alterity, even if the subject has to suffer through the augmentation of this ever more demanding violence.—Emmanuel Lévinas[426]

Is it righteous to read? How do liberal Jews, who view ethics as the core of their Judaism, read biblical violence in a way that advocates justice? In this thesis, I argued that an ethics of reading biblical violence for liberal Jews must combine legitimate readings with resisting readings. The former respect the implied author, and the latter serve the needs of the Other because they produce discourse that not only inspires but also demands ethical and political engagement in a broken world inhabited by people in need.

In chapter one, I discussed the difficulties of defining violence and noted two general approaches to that task: the MCV and the CCV. Having settled for the latter and adopted Audi's definition, I then presented two different taxa: one discriminates between different types of violence on the basis of the affected part of the human body; the other, and perhaps more important one, conceives of violence in terms of its purpose. This utilitarianism marks one of the defining features of Arendt's analysis of violence. This functionalist approach helps the reader fulfill his/her responsibility to the author by offering a tool to help discern the authorial intent behind the use of biblical violence.

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[426] Emmanuel Levinas, "Essence and Disinterestedness," in *BPR*, 121-122.

I then implemented this technique in chapters two and three. The former surveyed some of the many functions that biblical violence serves, and the latter did likewise but with two important conceptual distinctions. First, this chapter focused exclusively on Psalm 106 as opposed to a diversity of biblical texts. Second, I argued that the psalmist himself discerned that biblical violence has different functions.

I turned my attention to Numbers 16-17:5 in chapter four. Intrigued by the fiery consumption of Korah and the earth's consumption of Dathan and Abiram as well as the wilderness setting of those punishments, I maintained that spectacular violence works to reestablish power and to discourage people from challenging those in power. This thesis accords Arendt's insight into the antipodal relationship between power and violence. I also posited that the incineration of Korah and the earth's devouring of Dathan and Abiram transpires in the wilderness because that land's geographical characteristics enables and even heighten the drama of these spectacles. By entrenching Aaron's and Moses' leadership, the spectacular violence in Numbers 16-17:5 also to bolsters priestly and secular leaders' control over Judean exiles as the former engaged in a project of identity preservation. This enterprise acts as a mask, enabling authority figures to use their positions to prop themselves up and over the rest of the people whom they should be serving.

Informed by Lévinas' politics, I therefore claimed that Moses' and Aaron's recourse to violence exiles the ethical from the political, for they want to retain power for their own sake. The use of spectacular violence therefore reveals the corruption of politics, an erasure of the ethical from the undergirding structure of the political. What are the ethical implications of this reading? Not only violence but the threat and the signs of resorting to violence signal the breakdown of the justice and the disappearance of the ethical from politics. They mark a retreat

from the face-to-face, from the beneficent violence of revelation in which the I is for the Other, and movement *towards* selfishness in which the I is for itself against the Other. Such tell-tale signs call for action to protect and restore the ethical to the political. This resisting reading of Numbers 16 constitutes an ethics of reading because it respects authorial intent; yet, by rejecting the writer's underpinning ideological project, it also offers liberal Jews a basis for political activism grounded in the face-to-face.

In chapter five, I explored Judges 19-21 with most of my attention directed towards the first of those three chapters since, of all the acts of violence in this narrative, the gangrape and subsequent dismemberment of the nameless woman disturb me the most. Despite this unconsumable violence, I contended that the narrator/author, in fact, exploits the moral decadence and chaos in this tale to promote Israelite kingship. This argument clarifies why this story portrays the Levite as a callous, self-centered character; the Benjaminites as villains intent on directly shaming a priest but who settle for gangraping his concubine; and the Israelites as unqualified magistrates who vengefully almost wipe out their brethren only to grasp the implications of their transgressions and commit further ones by seizing blameless women to preserve the Benjaminite tribe. By enclosing this narrative between the remark, "there was no king in Israel" (Judg. 19:1; 21:25), the narrator implies that only a king could snuff out these depraved acts of violence. In this way, the author sends a similar message to the Israelites in the postexilic period: if they persist in their schismatic ways, Israel will dismember itself. Judges 19-21 thereby serves as a warning that reveals the need for Israelite kingship or some analogous form of centralized leadership in the Second Temple Period.

I also argued that the discourse around marriage and sexuality in Judges 19 objectifies the nameless woman by placing her in a subject-position through which a minimum of Foucauldian

power—which I explained in this chapter—flows. Her powerlessness obfuscates her face such that no one can ever hear her cry if they ever hear it at all. Rather than disempowering, obscuring, and silencing the marginalized, politics must attend to the needs of the disadvantaged and, in fact, serve those who are the least rather than the most well off. This reading sacralizes transforms a horrific tale of violence into a call to reorganize politics around and in service to the marginalized, what Lévinas would call the naked and the destitute, the widow and the orphan. Is it righteous to read? Only if one reads righteously, only if one reads to translate the face-to-face into everyday life by moving towards the violence of revelation.

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