

Introduction

Gale A. Yee and Athalya Brenner

This land is your land, this land is my land . . .

I roamed and I rambled and I followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts
While all around me a voice was sounding
This land was made for you and me.

This land is your land, this land is my land . . .¹

Land is central in Joshua and in Judges. It is defined as a pledged land, promised by the Hebrew God to his very own people. Much as the link between the God and his people is described as exclusive, later also as monogamist and monotheistic, so is the land. Other gods there might be; local inhabitants are acknowledged as such. But the link god-people-land excludes those inhabitants from legitimate ownership of their own land, although their actual existence is never denied. The foreignness of the Israelites, their original identity as newcomers from Mesopotamia and Egypt, is proudly stated as a token of positive otherness.

Thus the land is viewed as Israelite property as well as, paradoxically, an object of collective desire; attaining tangible rather than conceptual, wishful ownership of it is reflected in the biblical text as “just” but at the same time difficult, risky, fraught with tension, and elusive. This is the story of Joshua and Judges: How the land was acquired; how groups that came to be known as Hebrews or Israelites or Judahites joined the land’s indigenous and invader inhabitants and saw it as their very own.

Thus the motto for this Introduction, from the title and repeated lyrics of Woody Guthrie’s song, “This land is your land, this land is my land,” is used here ironically. Its usage here suggests exclusivity, not inclusivity. These books, like other biblical writings (mainly assigned by scholars to the various deuteronomic and deuteronomistic traditions preserved in the Bible), contain an awareness of a previous claim by other inhabitants but reject its validity,

citing divine promise to the claimants as justification, and human noncompliance with the divine demand for exclusivity as a reason for the difficulties in realizing the promise.

Land can be acquired by war and hostile invasion and by more peaceful means, such as slow infiltration, social integration, acculturation, and shared economic interests. Evidence from the new biblical archaeology points to the more sedentary and longer process of settlement by the newcomers in the land that even they called the land of Canaan; the biblical text too bears enough traces of that, in reports of economic transactions and intermarriage, for instance, not to mention the much-touted intermingling of religious beliefs and cultural norms. Had it not been like that, the biblical conflict of nativeness and otherness, of transcending boundaries while also establishing them and working to acquire a distinct group identity, would not have been that pronounced. Nevertheless, the literary medium chosen to express the realization of land-bound identity is that of warfare stories, *pace* the reality. In their recorded collective memory, those groups of “Israelites” became a nation around one land and one God through conquest, in the spirit of the times.

This largely or partly and also self-contradictory (between Joshua and Judges at the very least) fictive story of successful and at times “necessarily” cruel colonialism has since become internalized justification, on many fronts, for making “your land” into “my land,” with “God on our side.” It is perhaps less important whether the ban to –Yhwh² and the destruction of enemies in his name is historical or is culturally borrowed from other contemporaneous people, than the knowledge that it has been adopted by later cultures and is still practiced today, with divine justification of course. This is our legacy, and this is what our contributors struggle with, knowing full well that the process described in Joshua and Judges has wielded, and still does, enormous influence in the Western world: in this volume, the ideological rather than the historical implications are discussed. Like in the case of the biblical exodus traditions, the question must be asked, together with the textual Joshua: “Are you with us, or with our foes?” (Josh. 5:13); in your context, are you for the Canaanites and their later metaphorical equivalents, or for the Israelites and their metaphorical existence in your own life? In other words, “Which side are you on?”³

PART 1: WHAT DO WE, WHAT CAN WE DO, ABOUT JOSHUA AND JUDGES?

In the opening essay of this volume, “The God of Joshua: An Ambivalent Field of Negotiation,” Walter Brueggemann tackles the hermeneutical dilemma in Joshua that describes God legitimating violence so that Israel can occupy a land

already inhabited by other peoples. Brueggemann examines this theological difficulty first from the perspective of Israel's covenantal chosenness by God that bound the two parties in an exclusive relationship. The violent seizure of the land is the function of this chosenness. The consequence of this violence on the chosen's behalf is, for Brueggemann, the negation of the "other"—the book of Joshua's main story line. This violent exclusion of the other also underscores the fact that the book of Joshua exhibits no voices of dissent, divine or human, that stops short of violence, even though such voices of protest appear in other parts of the biblical tradition. Brueggemann appeals to Robert Polzin's insight that the traditions of Deuteronomy and the deuteronomistic history participate in a dialogue between "authoritarian dogmatism" and "critical traditionalism." Although the book of Joshua primarily exhibits the former, Brueggemann observes that critical traditionalism opens a space to continue a dissenting critique of the ideology of chosenness and violence that is espoused in Joshua.

Having written commentaries on Joshua and Judges in the evangelical Word Biblical Commentary series, Trent C. Butler approaches these books as a fledgling in postcolonial studies for this volume. He argues in "Joshua-Judges and Postcolonial Criticism" that the binaries of the West and the Rest and colonizer/colonized, which he sees in many postcolonial studies, cannot be easily applied to Israel as the colonizer of Canaan and the non-Israelites as colonized in Joshua and Judges, or vice versa. Each narrative and each character in these books stands somewhere on the continuum between colonizer and colonized at different parts of the narrative, and we must examine them as such.

In "Teaching the Book of Joshua, Critically, in an Israeli Secular Education," Yonina Dor and Naomi De-Malach approach Joshua from the context of the Bible curriculum in Israel's secular state school system. They pose a difficult question: How do instructors teach the biblical texts that are included in this curriculum, but whose explicit message offends their ethical values? Using Joshua as a test case, Dor and De-Malach first examine the wide range of Jewish attitudes toward Joshua from the talmudic period to present-day intellectuals, leaders, and educators. The book of Joshua provided ideological support for Zionism, the conquest of the land, and the expulsion of its residents, while others fear that the book will legitimate further violence in present-day Israel. The authors then investigate the history of approaches in teaching Joshua in Israel's state school system, which has increasingly excised chapters of the book in its curriculum. Particularly omitted are those references to the extermination of the inhabitants of the land, thus bypassing the moral questions that the book raises. In the major part of their essay, they offer another way of critically reading and teaching Joshua, one that transmits the Bible as the basis of

Jewish and Israeli identity, while stimulating criticism and challenging several of the traditional truths that form the basis of the national ethos.

Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, in her contribution, “Inside, Outside, or in Between: Feminist/Womanist Hermeneutical Challenges for Joshua and Judges,” comments at length about the violent nature of these biblical books and their continued influence on unethical behavior toward the other within and outside communities. She lists atrocities committed against others in contemporary Western cultures, especially American ones (both North and South) that are similar to those narrated in Joshua and Judges, and the analogy makes her even more uncomfortable. These texts, for her, are not empowering or comforting texts. Finding faith, love, and consolation in them is not easy, especially while looking at many stories there where female figures play a prominent role. And yet this must be done; and a cautious approach to these texts of violence must be exercised.

Kari Latvus, himself from Finland, examines “The Use of War Rhetoric in Finnish History during the Second World War.” Specifically, he studies the latter part of 1941, when the Finns seemed for a while to be successful in their military endeavor, named the Continuation War, and the data analyzed is the newspaper *Kotimaa* and the *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* (*Finnish Journal of Theology*). The Lutheran church supported the war. Latvus shows how the influence of biblical literature in that context was not dependent only on direct quotations from biblical sources. While there were not many direct appeals in theological rhetoric to Joshua and Judges, to Latvus’s own surprise, the spirit of these same biblical books—emphasis on divine chosenness dependent on righteous individual and collective behavior, a feeling of divine support, and promise for land, translated as it were into the Karelia Isthmus and beyond—was apparent in the materials examined. This is an important lesson for all of us: the Bible is everywhere in our lives, in our contexts, even if specific quotations are seldom or even never made. The impact, use, and abuse are there.⁴

The springboard of L. Daniel Hawk’s essay, “Indigenous Helpers and Invader Homelands,” is his reflection on a bronze statue of the Indian Maid of Fort Ball, near Tiffin, Ohio, where he grew up. This nameless woman evidently assisted American soldiers during the War of 1812, becoming one of a number of indigenous helpers in the master narrative of American expansionism. Hawk sees parallels in the ways biblical Israel and America both construct national identity through stories of conquest. Both portray the natives as misusing or afflicting the land. They thus need to be subdued and vanquished, so that the invaders may impose order and cleanse the land of any natives who remain.

Throughout this violent process stands the indigenous helper, who welcomes and supports the conquerors. In the book of Joshua, this mythic figure is Rahab.

PART 2: CASE STUDIES IN JUDGES

Although the book of Judges seems to be about male heroes, Athalya Brenner notes that women abound in the book, and stories about daughters begin and end it. Thus her title, “Women Frame the Book of Judges—How and Why?” For Brenner, this is not accidental. She uses the work of Yairah Amit on the editing of Judges and Ingeborg Löwisch on the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 to argue that the editing of Judges incorporated women by design. Editing usually occurs during times of crisis, and crisis brings women to the forefront in the work of memory. The closing frame, Judges 17–21, usually regarded as added later to an earlier core, is essential to the extant structure of the book, where women appear throughout. To remove these chapters would detract from the book’s structure, in the same way that removing chapters 30–31 and the important women in these would upset the structure of the book of Proverbs.

Ora Brison’s experience in an abused women’s shelter alerted her to the violence against women in Israel and influenced her choice of dissertation topic. To offset the experience of abused and humiliated women, she chose to write her thesis on strong, independent, and aggressive women: biblical heroines and heroic goddesses. In “Jael, *’eshet heber* the Kenite: A Diviner?” Brison argues that Jael’s encounter with Sisera was not sexual or maternal, as many scholars believe, but religious and cultic. She finds parallels between Jael and Sisera with the medium of Endor and Saul in 1 Samuel 28. Just as Saul seeks a diviner for military counsel, so does Sisera flee to the tent of Jael to consult her and the gods in the face of his humiliating defeat.

In “Choosing Sides in Judges 4–5: Rethinking Representations of Jael,” Ryan P. Bonfiglio observes that the difficulties his Italian immigrant grandparents faced as they settled in the United States give him insight into the dilemma that Jael may have faced as a non-Israelite, non-Canaanite outsider who had to choose sides. Bonfiglio takes up certain postcolonial observations about marginal groups in a dominant culture. They might be forced to imitate the culture, language, and values of the dominant group. Or they might assimilate and behave in ways that earn them rewards and affirmations from the dominant group, like those labeled “model minorities” in the United States. Bonfiglio sees two different biblical portrayals of Jael’s heroism. Judges 4 depicts her as a model minority, a heroine for Israel as a faithful outsider. She faces a choice in siding with the Israelites or with the Canaanites, and by choosing

the former, she becomes a heroine for Israel. Judges 5, however, eliminates the outsider language in describing Jael. She does not choose sides in Judges 5. Her defeat of Sisera is an act of self-defense against a potential rapist, presenting her as a model of agency and resistance for women.

Gale A. Yee's "The Woman Warrior Revisited: Jael, Fa Mulan, and American Orientalism" is the third essay in this volume to focus on Jael, reading Jael from Yee's Chinese American context. What inspired Yee's previous articles on Jael was her fascination with the Chinese woman warrior Fa Mulan. In this essay, she is able to explore the history and mythology surrounding Mulan more deeply. Yee argues that both Jael and Mulan share intercontextual features in their warriorhood, their slippery ethnicities, their (trans)gendering, and their long reception history that chronicles their oftentimes contradictory portrayals through the centuries. Yee highlights the American Orientalism of Disney's depiction of Mulan, arguing that it has been significant in the racial and gender formation of young Asian American females.

According to Meir Bar Mymon in "This Season You'll be Wearing God: On the Manning of Gideon and the Undressing of the Israelites (Judges 6:1—8:32)," Gideon puts on his masculinity the way he (Bar Mymon) had put on his Israeli military uniform and became the *Man*. The military forces young men to undergo a severe process of gender deconstruction and reconstruction so that they are completely assimilated into the hegemonic masculinity of warriors. Not only do they become the *Man* in this process, but the process also confirms the military as an all-hegemonic male establishment. The *Man* and the military need and reinforce each other in this ongoing symbiotic relationship. In the same way, not only does Gideon undergo a long process of masculinization, but so does Yhwh himself. Yhwh needs Gideon to manifest his own male dominance, just as Gideon needs YHWH to become a warrior. However, just as Gideon undressed himself of Yhwh, creates an ephod, and reenters civilian life, Bar Mymon took off and returned his uniform, and left the Israeli army to break free from the bloody games of war. Gideon showed him the possibilities of being a different kind of *Man*.

Institutional marginalization directly influences Pamela J. Milne's study, "From the Margins to the Margins: Jephthah's Daughter and Her Father." After her religious studies department was dissolved, Milne was moved to women's studies, but had to learn qualitative research methods and how to interview human subjects in order to teach their core course in feminist research. To hone her qualitative research and interviewing skills, Milne devised a project to discover whether or not feminist scholarship, biblical and other, is reaching beyond the academic feminist community. Her article presents the results that

she derived from having a small group of undergraduate and graduate volunteers interpret the story of Jephthah and her daughter from their different gendered and religious or a-religious perspectives.

Royce M. Victor grew up in India, where the finest literary works on Indian culture and life are revered: the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. His essay, “Delilah—A Forgotten Hero (Judges 16:4-21): A Cross-Cultural Narrative Reading,” interprets Delilah in light of a nameless courtesan in these works who sacrifices her life for the good of the country. Her story has been immortalized by writers, artists, and more recently in film. Victor argues that Delilah is a Philistine who works on behalf of her country to rid it of a violent social bandit whose only quality was his superhuman strength. She is often depicted as a prostitute working solely for money. But for Victor, Delilah risks her life in entering into a relationship with a fearsome threat to the community, and is successful in subduing him. She is a forgotten hero, like the nameless courtesan in Indian legends who is able to bring rain to her country at great danger to herself.

In “Narrative Loss, the (Important) Role of Women, and Community in Judges 19,” Brad Embry reads the story of the Levite concubine’s rape from his specific religious context, teaching at a Christian liberal arts university in the Pentecostal-Holiness Assemblies of God tradition. Having heard no sermons on Judges 19 or Bible studies discussing it, Embry saw how *unimportant* Judges 19 was in his denomination, which believed that the Bible provided parameters for its communal identity. He therefore explores the ramifications of omitting Judges 19 from the biblical narrative, especially for his community of faith. Pivotal in his essay is the importance of the female figure in Judges 19. Her rape, dismemberment, and death are potentially that of the whole nation. Her terrible fate provides the only critique powerful enough to awaken the community to its degenerate state. Her story is a vital reminder of a community’s capacity for horrendous evil and must not be elided from the large biblical story.

Janelle Stanley’s essay, “Judges 19: Text of Trauma,” is informed by her backgrounds in both clinical social work and biblical scholarship. She reads Judges 19 as a text displaying the classic symptoms of trauma: dissociation, repetition compulsion, and fragmentation. Dissociation is the desire to psychologically deny, flee from, or eliminate the trauma. Dissociation is evident in the characters’ lack of names in Judges 19 and the very truncated description of the concubine’s rape in verse 25. Repetition compulsion is the attempt by the psyche to enable a different outcome of the traumatic event. In Judges 19, this is evident in the double speeches of the old man and the repetition of the old man’s speech by the Levite (19:17b, 20) and by duplication with

the parallel story in Genesis 19. Fragmentation occurs when the psyche cuts off memories of the unbearable experience, distributing it to different parts of the self. Stanley sees this most clearly in the Levite's dismemberment of his concubine. The whole story reveals the psyche's attempt to "construct the narrative," the most important aspect of trauma therapy. In the retelling of the story, healing emerges.

So now as I'm leavin'
I'm weary as Hell
The confusion I'm feelin'
Ain't no tongue can tell
The words fill my head
And fall to the floor
If God's on our side
He'll stop the next war.⁵

We end this introduction with a quotation from Bob Dylan, as relevant today as when it was first composed, for the past and the present and for the future, if we wish to have a future. It is not easy to take sides for or against Joshua and Judges, the texts or their continued influence or the symbols they have become. So many factors are at stake. Each critical essay here collected proves the point in its own way. These essays also show how grappling with the questions raised is relevant in cultures, confessional and secularist alike, in which the Hebrew Bible functions as cultural heritage. When things have been said and analyses done, we all share Dylan's plea: whatever our side is, let there be peace; if God is on our side, whatever that side is, let him stop the next war. Let Us stop the next war.

Notes

1. From "This land is your land, this land is my land," by Woody Guthrie, lyrics 1940, first recording 1944.

2. In this volume, as in other volumes of this series on the Hebrew Bible, contributors use Bible/bible, God/god, and various spellings of the god of the Hebrew bible (such as YHWH, Yhwh, Yahweh) as befits their views and beliefs.

3. For extensive bibliographies on religion and violence, including violence in the Hebrew bible and scholarship thereon, see for instance Charles Bellinger's bibliographies on the Wabash Center website (<http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/result-browse.aspx?topic=549&pid=427> and <http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/article2.aspx?id=10516>).

4. For a recent collection about war literature in the Hebrew Bible and its influence on contemporary contexts, see the articles in Kelle and Ames 2008.

5. Last stanza, Bob Dylan, “With God on Our Side,” recorded 1963 on the album *The Times They Are a-Changin’* (some say inspired by Rom. 8:28–39).