

Uncovering Violence

Reading Biblical Narratives as an Ethical Project

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Introduction

The Challenge: Recognizing and Encountering Violence and Its Effects

CONFRONTING COMMON ASSUMPTIONS

This book emerged from many years of teaching a class called “Violence and the Bible” at a liberal arts college in the southeastern United States. In that class, I have had the opportunity to discuss the significance of violence and its effects in the worlds of the texts and in the worlds of my students. My students come with diverse academic interests, social backgrounds, and identities. Nonetheless, I have come to recognize three dominant trends in the assumptions that students often bring to the class at the start of the semester. The first trend—less frequent—is evident in the student who assumes that the violence of the Bible is evidence that the Bible is irrelevant to modern life and might also be evidence of the danger of religion more generally. This student sees the Bible as a cause of social and personal harm that authorizes a worldview that villainizes those of different ethnic backgrounds than the Israelites and celebrates conquest and divinely authorized warfare. The second trend—much more frequent—is the student who thinks that a course on violence and the Bible will be about the Hebrew Bible exclusively; this student is initially confused by the inclusion of New Testament material in the course because of a widely held stereotype about the angry, warring God of the Old Testament as compared to the loving Jesus of the Christian tradition who corrects the vengeful, primitive religion of the Israelites. A third trend characterizes nearly all my students: most assume that the Bible is religiously and culturally important because it offers moral guidelines and ethical principles; a common assumption is that those moral guidelines are at the heart of the Bible’s status as a sacred text. For

some, the ethical principles of the Bible are outmoded and irrelevant to modern culture. For others, the ethical principles of the New Testament, as they perceive them, should determine the extent to which one applies the lessons of the Old Testament in the modern world. But nearly all my students begin the class with the idea that reading the Bible through an ethical lens will result in something like a discrete list of moral principles that one might then apply to one's personal behavior and one's social and political engagement in the world today.

My students come by these assumptions fairly; it is important to note that these trends are current in popular perceptions of the Bible. Yet all these perceptions are problematic in significant ways and limit the potential of the Bible to assist modern readers in interacting with the biblical text in a manner that empowers a capacious sense of ethical reading and living. In response to what I have seen as the dominant trends in my students' initial perceptions about violence and the Bible, and in collaboration with those very students who have helped me to chart a different path, I have set out to write a book about violence and the Bible, the Hebrew Bible in particular, that starts from a different set of assumptions: Namely, that the texts reflect the insights and experiences of perspicacious, complicated, and compassionate people with theological integrity who lived through and were shaped by violent experiences in which they also participated. The complexity of the violence that moves through the texts of the Hebrew Bible should not be read instrumentally, as a way to affirm constructions of Christian values, however those are conceived. Nor should these narratives be read reductively as treatises on ethics that offer transhistorical and discrete lessons for moral behavior. Rather, my working premise is that the reader's entanglement with the violence of the Hebrew Bible offers an opportunity to interact with and be formed by challenging and multivalent narrative offerings, with all their ambiguity, alterity, and unsettling complexity. My project in this book is to uncover and reckon with the ethical complexity of biblical narratives in hopes that this engagement with violence in biblical stories will also empower readers to identify and confront violence in their own realities.

Violence Is Complex and Critiqued within the Bible Itself

First, it is important to recognize that the Bible does indeed contain problematic, and sometimes appalling, portrayals of violence. Much of the Hebrew Bible originated in political, religious, and cultural conflict, and many biblical texts reflect and respond to those experiences, traumas, and memories.¹

1. For recent discussion of the Hebrew Bible's origins in trauma, see David Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

Though there are certainly examples of violence that are affirmed within the Hebrew Bible, the presence of violence need not indicate that the authors or the community that received the text celebrated the violence in those depictions.² In fact, the presence of detailed and complex depictions of violence is often evidence that the producers of these writings were acutely aware of the way violence informed and shaped their realities; they used their textual traditions to explore the contours and implications of that violence. To be sure, readers must reckon with the presence of violence in the biblical text. Violence is not only to be encountered in the warfare texts of the Hebrew Bible that are perhaps the most widely recognized, but is also present in more subtle ways, such as representations of distorted and unequal power relations; threats of social marginalization, oppression, and poverty; and traumatic memories. One assumption of this book is that violence is a multifaceted, complex, and often indirect phenomenon. A primary goal is to provide readers with a vocabulary of violence that expands the ability to recognize and respond to violence. Readers must simultaneously reckon with the complexity and subtlety of the depiction of violence as well as its reception among later readers.

Relatedly, it is important to recognize that the Bible is multivocal, with a variety of perspectives on violence. Moreover, the Bible contains what Ellen Davis calls an “inner biblical hermeneutic,” an ongoing dialogue in which biblical authors responded to, interpreted, and creatively appropriated the tradition they received, especially the biblical traditions that became morally difficult to later interpreters.³ As Davis says, “The artful negotiation of difficulty was a primary factor in producing the biblical books as we have them, as tradents struggled in faith (I am convinced) to preserve and pass on what they have received as authoritative, while at the same time they registered for their own and future generations profound changes in the understandings of faith.”⁴ Understanding the Bible to have developed as the result of dynamic—not static—processes of ethical reflection and creative reinterpretation of the past even while maintaining connection to that very tradition is itself evidence

2. See also Joel Kaminsky, “Violence in the Bible,” *Society of Biblical Literature Forum*, <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=159>: “Perhaps the most pervasive problem has been the tendency to assume that if a biblical account includes violent actions, then the text itself endorses the violence exhibited in it.”

3. Ellen Davis, “Critical Traditioning: Seeking an Inner Biblical Hermeneutic,” *Anglican Theological Review* 82, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 736.

4. Davis, “Critical Traditioning,” 736. Davis’s comments build upon Michael Fishbane’s work on “innerbiblical exegesis,” in *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

that people in the past often perceived difficult texts to be sources of ethical possibility and theological engagement.

For Davis, engaging with the difficult themes of the Bible in a way that produces change and connection simultaneously is a theological enterprise, motivated by a central question: “What should we in the Church do with biblical texts that do not seem to accord with a well-considered understanding of the Christian faith?”⁵ As someone who identifies as Christian, I certainly value this question. Yet as someone who thinks about and discusses difficult texts with people of diverse religious backgrounds or no traditional religious commitments, I assert that the Bible offers significant insight into the experience of violence and that careful engagement with it is relevant to everyone. My hope is that ethical engagement with violence in the Bible will be of vital interest to those with theological commitments and also for those who, like my students, want to make the world a less violent place, who are interested in the possibilities of ethical engagement in textual interpretation as a way of fostering greater awareness of and responsiveness to the ways human beings are made and unmade by subtle and direct forms of violence. To that end, I write this book for readers who are interested in developing a process of engagement with biblical texts that involves attentiveness to the particularity of biblical storytelling, critical and compassionate listening and responses to texts, and recognizing that biblical storytelling and interpretation of those stories is always a process of revision and re-creation, a process that occurs both in the Bible itself and in later reception. Such a process-oriented, relationship-centric mode of engagement with biblical texts is an ethical project that, I believe, has implications for ethical reflection and action in nontheological arenas as well as in theological circles.

Rejection of Negative Comparisons between Violence of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament

The Christian tendency to read the Hebrew Bible negatively in comparison with a presumably more peaceful New Testament has a long and tragic past in biblical studies, often perpetuating anti-Semitic claims about the validity and value of Christianity over and against Judaism.⁶ As Susan Niditch observes in

5. Davis, “Critical Traditioning,” 733.

6. For instance, see Robert Kysar, “Anti-Semitism and the Gospel of John,” in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 113–27; Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

her now classic work, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence*, understandings of war in the Hebrew Bible often “intermingle uncomfortably with generalizations about Jewish world-view, perpetuating the stereotype of the violent ‘Old’ Testament, of law vs. gospel; justice vs. mercy; judgment vs. love.”⁷ The failure of attention given to the violence of the New Testament among Christian interpreters is directly related to a centuries-long anti-Jewish bias, famously evident in the early church figure Marcion of Sinope’s second-century argument that the Old Testament God and the New Testament God are essentially different, the first a god of vengeance and violence and the second a god of mercy and love.⁸ Marcion’s legacy has been replicated in interpretations that have assumed that New Testament texts are “somehow above the fray” and not deeply connected to the violence of Christian history.⁹

In fact, violence is a feature of the New Testament texts (and reception of those texts) in authorizations of slavery (e.g., Eph. 6:5–8, Col. 3:22–24, 1 Tim. 6:1–2, Titus 2:9–10, 1 Pet. 2:18), the subordination of women (e.g., Col. 3:18, 1 Tim. 2:11–15, Titus 2:3–5), images of Jesus as a warrior (Rev. 19:11–16), and anti-Jewish language (e.g., John 8:44). The mistaken dichotomy between the violence of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament is entrenched, however, and readers should confront and challenge it at every turn lest it continue to produce dangerous misunderstandings of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament as well as Judaism and Christianity.¹⁰ Fortunately, in addition to increasing scholarship on Christian anti-Semitism, violence in the New Testament is currently receiving important scholarly attention, correcting mistaken assumptions about violence in both scriptural traditions.¹¹ While I focus on the narratives of the Hebrew Bible in this book,

7. Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5.

8. See also Shelly Matthews and E. Leigh Gibson, eds. *Violence in the New Testament* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 1.

9. Matthew and Gibson, *Violence in the New Testament*, 1.

10. One extreme consequence of this presumption that Christianity is superior to Judaism is the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on October 27, 2018, when shooter Robert Gregory Bowers killed eleven people and wounded six during Shabbat morning services. Found on his computer were references to John 8:44: “Jews are the Children of Satan.” See Candida Moss, “How Bigots Easily Exploit the Bible for Anti-Semitism,” *The Daily Beast*, October 29, 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-bigots-easily-exploit-the-bible-for-anti-semitism>.

11. For discussion of violence in the New Testament, see Michel Desjardins, *Peace, Violence and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997); George Aichele, “Jesus’ Violence,” in *Violence, Utopia and the Kingdom of God: Fantasy and Ideology in the Bible*, ed. George Aichele and Tina Pippin (New York: Routledge, 1998), 72–91; Denny J. Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); Matthews and Gibson, eds., *Violence in the New*

I do so because the Hebrew Bible is my area of professional training and interest, not because I believe violence is a unique problem in the Hebrew Bible as opposed to the New Testament.

Reading Narratives Requires Its Own Mode of Ethical Engagement

I am sympathetic with my students who anticipate that an ethical approach to the Bible will result in concrete and specific understandings about ethical action, something akin to normative ethical claims that they can use in their lives in a more or less direct way. I do not think such an approach to biblical interpretation is by definition impossible or inadvisable, yet the model of ethical interpretation I employ is linked to the genre of the material I address, biblical narratives, which do not conclude with summaries of their ethical significance, nor do they result in a set of ethical principles one should adopt. Narratives are unlike legal codes, which feature commands and direct advisement about behavior, such as “Do not kill” (Exod. 20:13) or “Do not boil a kid in its mother’s milk” (Exod. 23:19). This is not to say that legal codes do not require interpretation. Yet the generic conventions of legal material and narratives are different enough that explicit attention to the way one reads narratives through an ethical lens is required. How does the reader join recognition of the conventions of narrative texts—such as plot development, characterization, and ambiguity—with a model of ethical reflection that recognizes the particularity of stories and their resistance to universal ethical claims that one might associate with the goals of ethical inquiry? In what way is reading and engaging with violence found in the Bible an ethical project? I offer a more fully developed response to these questions below.

In the following sections, I discuss conceptual equipment that will prepare the reader for later chapters. First, I briefly introduce the ongoing scholarly conversation about violence and the Bible to orient readers. Second, I present concepts of violence that help readers understand its complex permutations. Third, I introduce a theory of reading as ethics that is the methodological framework for my analysis. Finally, I explain the selection of texts analyzed in subsequent chapters and explain what is to come. My intent is to offer an

Testament; John Sanders, ed., *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006); David J. Neville, “Toward a Teleology of Peace: Contesting Matthew’s Violent Eschatology,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30, no. 2 (2007): 131–61; Ra’anan Boustan, Alex Jassen, and Calvin Roetzel, eds., *Violence, Scripture, and Textual Practice in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Jennifer Glancy, *Slavery as Moral Problem: In the Early Church and Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011).

approach to engaging with the violence of the Bible that does justice to the many ways violence may be encountered in biblical narratives and to offer examples of reading as ethics that reflect the particular way in which stories provide narrative space for ethical reflection.

CONCEPTUAL EQUIPMENT: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE SCHOLARSHIP ABOUT VIOLENCE

Since John Collins's seminal presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature in 2002 and subsequent publication, "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," there has been intense interest in the study of violence in the Bible as a matter of urgent concern.¹² Though significant work on violence pre-dates Collins's address, Collins set a course for biblical violence as a needed topic of further study.¹³ The result has been thoughtful and provocative publications that have made clear that biblical violence is a timely, relevant, and necessary subject for further research and discussion. Though I do not undertake a full history of interpretation of violence in the Bible here, I offer some heuristic categories that will help the reader situate this book within the landscape of biblical scholarship.

At the risk of oversimplification, I see three large categories of work on the topic of violence in biblical studies. These categories overlap, and the

12. John Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 1 (2003): 3–21.

13. Examples of treatments prior to 2002 include Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Robert Allen Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today," *Christianity and Crisis* 49 (1989): 261–65; David R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993); Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 1993; Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Gerd Lüdemann, *The Unholy in Holy Scripture: The Dark Side of the Bible*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996); Harold Washington, "Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Hebrew Bible: A New Historicist Approach," *Biblical Interpretation* 5, no. 4 (1997): 324–63; Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); David Penchansky, *What Rough Beast?: Images of God in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999); Mark McEntire, *The Blood of Abel: The Violent Plot in the Hebrew Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999); Peter C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978); Raymond T. Hobbs, *A Time for War: A Study of Warfare in the Old Testament* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1989); Millard C. Lind, *Yabweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Israel* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980); Charles Sherlock, *The God Who Fights: The War Tradition in Holy Scripture* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1993).

boundaries of these groupings are porous. The first grouping has theological and ethical concerns at the center, often focusing on how the violent texts of the Bible can be interpreted as canonical Scripture for the Christian church.¹⁴ There is significant diversity among such readings, to be sure, yet these interpretations are similar in that they assume the vital role of the Bible in religious communities and the hermeneutical challenges of religious communities who find the violence in the Bible to be theologically problematic.¹⁵

The second major grouping of biblical scholarship utilizes historical and social scientific methods of sociology and anthropology to understand the practices of ancient Israelites regarding violence, the political context of warfare, and cultural understandings that shed light on the way violence functioned in the ancient world. I say more about social scientific approaches to the study of violence below when I discuss ritual and cultural violence. Rather than speaking to a theological concern of a living religious community

14. Examples of Christian theological readings include Ellen Davis, “Critical Traditioning; Jerome F. D. Creach, *Violence in Scripture*, Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013); Terence E. Fretheim, “God and Violence in the Old Testament,” *Word & World* 24 (2004): 18–28; Eryl W. Davies, “The Morally Dubious Passages of the Hebrew Bible: An Examination of Some Proposed Solutions,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 3 (2005): 197–228; Eryl W. Davies, *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010); Eric A. Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament’s Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012); Eric A. Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009); John Dominic Crossan, *How to Read the Bible and Still Be a Christian: Struggling with Divine Violence from Genesis through Revelation* (New York: HarperOne, 2015); Philip Jenkins, *Laying Down the Sword: Why We Can’t Ignore the Bible’s Violent Verses* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011); Walter Brueggemann, *Divine Presence amid Violence: Contextualizing the Book of Joshua* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009); Heath A. Thomas, Jeremy Evans, and Paul Copan, eds., *Holy War in the Bible: Christian Morality and an Old Testament Problem* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013); M. Daniel Carroll R. and J. Blair Wilgus, eds., *Wrestling with the Violence of God: Soundings in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015); David Lamb, *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist, and Racist?* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011). Two overviews of the development of this conversation among Christian interpreters are Eric A. Seibert, “Recent Research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament (with Special Attention to Christian Theological Perspectives,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 15 (2016): 8–40 and Brad E. Kelle, *The Bible and Moral Injury: Reading Scripture Alongside War’s Unseen Wounds* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2020): 139–68.

15. Recent examples of theological treatments from Jewish perspectives include Isaac Kalimi, *Jewish Bible Theology: Perspectives and Case Studies* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2012) and Joel Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007). For a philosophical approach that discusses biblical texts, see Alan L. Mittleman, *Does Judaism Condone Violence? Holiness and Ethics in the Jewish Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

directly, social scientific scholarship illuminates the culture and practices of the people who produced these texts, the societies in which they were embedded, and the political situations with which they contended.¹⁶

A third category of scholarship about violence and the Bible utilizes literary and ideological criticism, with a focus on literary features and themes, the identities and ideological commitments of authors and readers, and the ways that biblical texts reflect and create systems of power in the ancient context and in the modern world today. Because of the pervasive theme of sexual violence against women and the origins of the biblical texts in patriarchal and androcentric societies, as well as the ways the Bible has been inherited and utilized in ways that have created and/or contributed to the disempowerment of women, scholarly works in this category often address issues of sexuality, gender, and violence in ancient and modern contexts.¹⁷

16. Examples of a historical and/or social scientific approaches to the study of violence include T. M. Lemos, "Shame and Mutilation of Enemies in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 2 (2006): 225–41; T. M. Lemos, *Violence and Personhood in Ancient Israel and Comparative Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Brad E. Kelle and Frank Ritche Ames, eds., *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritche Ames, and Jacob L. Wright, eds. *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014); Saul Olyan, *Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible: New Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Zainab Bahrani, *Rituals of War: The Body and Violence in Mesopotamia* (New York: Zone Books, 2008). For an overview and comparison of works in this category, see T. M. Lemos, "Order from Chaos: Comparing Approaches to Violence in Anthropology, Assyriology, and the Study of the Hebrew Bible," *Currents in Biblical Research* 18, no. 2 (2020): 160–75.

17. Examples of literary and ideological treatments of violence in the Bible include Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror*; Chris Franke and Julia M. O'Brien, eds., *Aesthetics of Violence in the Prophets* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010); Lauren A. S. Monroe, "Disembodied Women: Sacrificial Language and the Deaths of Bat-Jephthah, Cozbi, and the Bethlehemite Concubine," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2013): 32–52; Robin Gallaher Branch, "Blood on Their Hands: How Heroines in Biblical and Apocryphal Literature Differ from Those in Ancient Literature Regarding Violence," *In die Skriflig* 48, no. 2 (2014), Academic OneFile; Amy Kalmanofsky, ed., *Sexual Violence and Sacred Text* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017); Jan William Tarlin, "Utopia and Pornography in Ezekiel: Violence, Hope, and the Shattered Male Subject," in *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*, ed. Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn (London: Routledge, 1997), 175–83; Thomas W. Martin, "The Silence of God: A Literary Study of Voice and Violence in the Book of Revelation," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41, no. 2 (2018): 246–60; Juliana Claassens, "The Hidden Wounds of Structural Violence: Exploring an Intersectional Understanding of Violence in Jeremiah 4–6," *Old Testament Essays* 31, no. 3 (2018): 613–29; Rhiannon Graybill, Beatrice Lawrence, and Meredith Minister, eds., *Rape Culture and Religious*

Again, these categories of scholarship are not utterly distinct, and there are subtleties that are missed in this presentation of the work of scholars who are engaged in a rich and complex investigation of violence.¹⁸ I adopt an eclectic approach in this book and draw upon works that fall under each of these categories. Indeed, what I offer in this book is not an alternative to any of these approaches, but a furthering of these approaches that addresses two gaps in scholarship. First, it is important to offer a roadmap that expands the conceptions of violence that scholars address. There is much biblical scholarship that attends to direct violence, harm inflicted against another's body, but I hope to enrich the treatment of violence and the Bible through an interdisciplinary approach to the study of violence and its effects. To that end, I present a broader range of categories of violence, drawn from various disciplines, in hopes that the ongoing discussion of violence and the Bible will grow to encompass the many subtle forms of violence reflected in the biblical text.

Second, to return to my students' dilemma about ethical reflection when reading stories, I bring to bear an ethical approach to reading that is attentive to the particularities of narrative. My question is not, What ethical principle should I apply (or reject) to help me live in a more ethical way? My question is, What is it to read a story with similar expectations one brings to engaging a person, if one assumes—as, I think, we should—that a person has the power to influence one's perceptions, sensibilities, and field of vision? What if encountering the particularities of a story offers the same kind of relational impact as encountering human particularity, both able to permeate one's thinking, feeling, and sensing?

This book thus aims to make two significant contributions to the ongoing conversation about violence and the Hebrew Bible: first, by expanding the ways readers recognize violence, offering various categories, approaches, and vocabularies that will enable readers to recognize violence in its many permutations and expressions, explicit and subtle. Second, this book addresses a larger hermeneutical question that connects ethics with the reading process: What happens in the process of reading violent texts? As interpreters recognize more of the complexity of representations of violence in the Bible, an approach is required that attends to the way readers are formed within and are relationally accountable to those representations. This book introduces

Studies: Critical and Pedagogical Engagements, Feminist Studies and Sacred Texts (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019.)

18. For instance, several important works do not fall neatly in any of the categories I describe: Markus Zehnder and Hallvard Hagelia, eds., *Encountering Violence in the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013); Dereck Daschke, ed., *A Cry Instead of Justice: The Bible and Cultures of Violence in Psychological Perspective* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

an approach to reading biblical violence ethically that is not based on mining the text for moral gems to be extracted and applied to modern life but on the concept of reading as encounter and witness.¹⁹ Influenced by Adam Zachary Newton's idea of narrative ethics, I frame reading the biblical text as an ethical encounter with violence that places a claim on the reader, much like witnessing violence in one's nontextual encounters.²⁰ This kind of analysis resists summative moral claims as the goal of ethical reading. Rather, narrative ethics enables readers to develop a capacious understanding of and responsibility to violence in its various causes, shapes, and forms; the sounds and silences of violence; and the ways it transforms and reshapes people, environments, communities, desires, and bodies.

Conceptual Equipment: What Is Violence?

As John Collins has noted, violence is a complicated phenomenon; he therefore focused his analysis on readily identifiable acts of violence, "the most obvious, even crude, forms of violence—the killing of others without benefit of judicial procedure."²¹ In this section, my intent is to expand the definitions of violence readers might use as tools to see, sense, examine, and consider violence within the textual worlds of the Hebrew Bible. As the current literature on violence studies evolves, the discussion grows increasingly complex.²²

19. Reading the Bible through the lens of ethics is a long-standing practice within biblical studies and has resulted in rich and sophisticated treatments of ethical theory, political and ethical implications of hermeneutical strategies, and consideration of what modern readers often find to be problematic texts, such as depictions of conquest in Joshua and Judges and poetic celebration of killing enemies in Psalms 58 and 137. Though I am reliant upon many of those works, in this book I am trying to more intentionally connect the reading process itself to ethical reflection. I cannot list all of the works that I have found to be useful in considering the relationship between the Bible and ethics, but the following are some of the most influential in my consideration of these issues: Davies, *The Immoral Bible*; J. W. Rogerson and M. Daniel Carroll R., *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Susanne Scholz and Pablo R. Andiñach, eds., *La Violencia and the Hebrew Bible: The Politics and Histories of Biblical Hermeneutics on the American Continent* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016); Dirk J. Human, ed., *Psalmody and Poetry in Old Testament Ethics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012); Mark J. Boda, "Poethics? The Use of Biblical Hebrew Poetry in Ethical Reflection on the Old Testament," *Currents in Biblical Research* 14, no. 1 (2015): 45–61.

20. Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

21. J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas," 3.

22. For instance, David Riches, "The Phenomenon of Violence," in *The Anthropology of Violence*, ed. David Riches (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 1–27; Randall

Some forms of biblical violence are easily recognized, especially in texts that contain acts of physical harm. Other types of violence, such as structural or symbolic violence, are less readily recognized and challenge notions about what violence is and where it occurs. In short, violence is reflected in texts in a wide variety of ways and calls for different types of engagement from the reader in particular narrative and poetic settings. No single definition adequately describes violence as a force.

Johan Galtung, who has categorized and described violence, offers the following basic definition: “As a point of departure, let us say that *violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations.*”²³ Though helpful as a way of expanding the concept of violence beyond acts of immediate physical harm, such as stabbing, hitting, etc., this definition is quite broad. Yet there are also problems, significantly more grievous, caused by limiting the understanding of violence too strictly. Definitions that stretch habitual understandings of violence enable readers to see the subtle permutations of violence as they echo through texts. As a point of departure, I operate with expansive and multiple definitions in the hope of being able to recognize more of the complexity of violence and its effects.

The following categories of violence are not absolutely distinct, nor do they exhaust the ways one might conceptualize violence. I have also included effects of violence, such as trauma and moral injury, in this conversation because I want to intentionally undermine ideas of violence as a discrete event or an isolated action, disconnected from the aftermath as it registers in the lives of all those who are proximate to it. However it is conceptualized, violence and its effects are connected. In what follows I provide what I hope is a useful set of vocabulary and heuristic lenses through which to view the violence of the Bible: direct or immediate violence, textual or symbolic violence, structural and cultural violence, slow violence, interpretive violence, violence as complicity, trauma and moral injury, and constructive violence.

Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, New Directions in Critical Theory, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim, eds., *On Violence: A Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Ramphele, and Pamela Reynolds, eds., *Violence and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Ann V. Murphy, *Violence and the Philosophical Imaginary*, SUNY Series in Gender Theory (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).

23. Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Public Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 168, italics original.

Direct or Immediate Violence

Direct violence is the immediate, perceptible harm or abuse done to a human being.²⁴ As Galtung describes, direct or immediate violence is “*somatic* incapacitation, or deprivation of health alone (with killing as the extreme form), at the hands of an *actor* who *intends* this to be the consequence.”²⁵ Because direct violence is noticeable, often resulting in physical wounds, and is usually personal and intentional, the result of an action of one against another, it needs much less introduction as a category. Direct violence is often visible, resulting from physical acts of harm: slapping, kicking, cutting, burning, and other like actions. Immediate violence is also the denial of sustenance—the means of survival—including starving or denial of food, air, water, and movement.²⁶ Acts of military warfare are often best categorized as direct violence, simply because war results in acts of harm against human bodies, though war can be waged in more subtle ways as well.

Warfare is perhaps the most prominent example of direct violence in the Hebrew Bible, though there are certainly other examples, such as sexual assault and rape. While instances of direct violence such as warfare may be more immediately detectable in biblical texts than other types of violence discussed below, the textual representation of warfare as well as its historical, social, cultural, ethical, and religious significance is less clear and deserves nuanced analysis. Warfare is often a central feature of biblical texts. For this reason, biblical warfare has been the subject of rich and interdisciplinary scholarly treatments.²⁷

24. This language of direct violence and structural violence is indebted to Johan Galtung, who has done important work in distinguishing types of violence and peace. For a typology of direct and structural violence, see “Cultural Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 292.

25. Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Public Research,” 168, italics original.

26. Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Public Research,” 174.

27. Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*; Kelle and Ames, eds., *Writing and Reading War*; Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritchel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright, eds., *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014); Elizabeth Bloch Smith, “The Impact of Siege Warfare on Biblical Conceptualizations of YHWH,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, no. 1 (2018): 19–28; Charlie Trimm, “Recent Research on Warfare in the Old Testament,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 10, no. 2 (2012): 171–216; Marion Ann Taylor and Christiana de Groot, eds., *Women of War, Women of Woe: Joshua and Judges through the Eyes of Nineteenth-Century Female Biblical Interpreters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).

Textual or Symbolic Violence

John Collins argues that there is a thin line between acts of physical and symbolic violence: “the line between actual killing and verbal, symbolic, or imaginary violence is thin and permeable. The threat of violence is a method of forceful coercion, even if no blood is actually shed.”²⁸ In like manner, literary critics Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse argue for continuity between material and representational violence: “We have offered a crude distinction between two modalities of violence: that which is ‘out there’ in the world, as opposed to that which is exercised through words upon things in the world. . . . But our ultimate goal is to demonstrate that the two cannot in fact be distinguished.”²⁹ These scholars recognize that language, symbols, and rhetoric can be considered potentially violent, even if they do not lead directly to physical harm.³⁰

Especially to the extent that symbols and imagistic language construct worlds of fear and threat, they can act as tools of coercion and intimidation. Adela Yarbro Collins addresses this aspect of textual violence in her discussion of imagery in the book of Revelation. Though A. Y. Collins argues that violent desires might be purged in their expression, she also recognizes that symbolism can create and intensify fear just as readily as it expunges it.³¹ As Collins says of the book of Revelation, especially chapter 12, “These vivid images are certainly designed more to evoke terror than to allay it.”³² Violent rhetoric has violent power.

Because of their symbolic nature, ritual actions as they are represented in biblical texts are also important to consider.³³ Examples of ritual violence

28. J. Collins, “The Zeal of Phinehas,” 4. Mark Juergensmeyer also connects violent texts and rituals (symbolic violence) and cultures of violence that authorizes violent acts. See Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 10, 163–64.

29. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 9. For further discussion of the relationship between literary representations of violence and violent action, see especially Margo Kitts, “Religion and Violence from Literary Perspectives,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 410–23.

30. See my discussion of the way violent rhetoric may create fear in those who witness that language, especially in Psalm 109: Amy Cottrill, *Language, Power, and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 138–56.

31. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 152–53.

32. A. Y. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 153.

33. See 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 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 169–80

are found in a number of different texts, including animal sacrifice and the slaughter of enemies via the *cherem* command (Deut. 2:34, 3:6, 7:2, Josh. 2:10, 10:28), mourning rituals (Isa. 15:2, Jer. 16:6, Ezra 9:3), and rituals of stripping enemy combatants after battle to symbolically represent defeat.³⁴ Rituals might target the body or the material artifacts that represent the deity or the sacred, but, as Saul Olyan describes, “in all cases, the violent acts are deployed strategically: to shame, terrorize, transform or perpetuate a preexisting social relationship or to constitute a new one.”³⁵ Especially insofar as violent ritual, “serves to create and uncreate personhood,” ritual can symbolically humanize or dehumanize individuals and decide their relative worth in society.³⁶

Structural and Cultural Violence

Galtung coined the phrase “structural violence” in the 1960s to describe violence that is political, social, psychological, economic, ideological, and legal, embedded in the invisible structures of everyday life.³⁷ Direct and structural violence may be mutually reinforcing, but they need not be. In contrast with direct violence, systemic violence is more difficult to recognize and describe because it is not observable as direct action by one individual upon another. Structural violence is potent and persuasive because it is “like the air around us,” tranquil and normal.³⁸ Because of its ubiquity and ordinariness, it comes to seem natural to those who live within these structures and operate within the culturally authoritative systems by which certain entities acquire and

and Olyan, ed., *Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible*; Scott B. Noegel, “The Ritual Use of Linguistic and Textual Violence in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East,” *State, Power, and Violence*, Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual, vol. 3, ed. Margo Kitts, Bernd Schneidmüller, Gerald Schwedler, Eleni Tounta, Herman Kulke, and Uwe Skoda (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 33–46; Scott B. Noegel, “Dismemberment, Creation, and Ritual: Images of Divine Violence in the Ancient Near East,” in *Belief and Bloodshed: Religion and Violence Across Time and Tradition*, ed. James K. Wellman Jr. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 13–27; Tobin Siebers, “The Return to Ritual: Violence and Art in the Media Age,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 5, no. 1 (December 2003): 9–33; Margo Kitts, *Elements of Ritual and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Kelle, Ames, Wright, *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol*.

34. For further examples, see Saul Olyan, “Introduction: Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible,” in Olyan, ed., *Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible*, 2.

35. Saul Olyan, “Introduction: Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible,” 3.

36. Lemos, *Violence and Personhood*, 17.

37. Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Public Research,” 6.

38. Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Public Research,” 173.

maintain power, resources, and influence.³⁹ This kind of violence does not necessarily result in direct or immediate violence, though it often has physical effects over time. Medical anthropologist Paul Farmer, for instance, has described the connection between sickness, disease, and economic deprivation that is a result of structural injustice.⁴⁰ Farmer's work shows that structural violence may be difficult to perceive, but its physical effects are often clearly visible; such connections between unjust systemic processes and the physical, lived realities of people and communities are brought into relief when scholars, interpreters, and readers employ a process-oriented understanding of violence.

Political theorist and philosopher Iris Marion Young recognizes structural oppression as "the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms—in short, the normal processes of everyday life."⁴¹ Embedded in Young's description of structural oppression and violence are both visible and invisible systems of power that have the capacity to place constraints upon individuals and communities. Examples of visible systems of power are laws, trade policies, tax codes, stereotypes that are apparent in media, and any authorized and explicit policy of social organization that has as its effect the empowerment of some (through power or resources) and the limitation of others. In biblical scholarship, visible systems of structural violence have been discussed most often in biblical legal codes. For instance, scholars like Harold Washington and Carolyn Pressler have discussed the ways in which biblical laws often authorized acts of violence against women, especially those from conquered populations.⁴² No matter the intent of these laws or whether they were actually practiced, Washington and Pressler discuss how they effectively normalized

39. Iris Marion Young describes oppression as the forces that limit "individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation." Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 39.

40. Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Farmer, "On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below," *Daedalus* 125, no. 1 (1996): 261–83.

41. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 41.

42. See, for instance, Deuteronomy 21:10–14. For critical discussion of the law as a form of violence, see Washington, "Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Hebrew Bible"; Harold Washington, "Lest He Die in the Battle and Another Man Take Her," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Bernard M. Levinson, Victor H. Matthews, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 185–213; Carolyn Pressler, "Sexual Violence and the Deuteronomic Law," in *A Feminist Companion to the Bible: Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner

the concept of women as the property of male warriors, a theft of social and cultural power. In these legal texts, patterns of violence against women are made legal and acceptable through authoritative and powerful language.

Equally important and more difficult to recognize are invisible systems of structural violence. According to Young, structural oppression is difficult to recognize because it contradicts the idea of oppression as that which one tyrannical group visibly imposes on a less powerful group. Often, structural violence hides in thoughts, patterns of decision making, interactive processes, and limiting stereotypes that disempower and foster harm against less socially powerful individuals and groups. Cheryl Anderson expands the concept of legal violence in the Hebrew Bible to include not only actions that are made legal or illegal in specific laws but also perspectives excluded in the formation of the law.⁴³ According to Anderson, legal texts that do not consider or include the perspective of women are a form of violence.⁴⁴ Anderson's notion of violence includes perspectives, interactions, and structures of power that are preserved when marginalized perspectives are excluded from decision-making. Whether visible or invisible, systemic violence has to do with the normal processes and structures that shape everyday life for individuals and communities and that come to seem a part of the "weave of life."⁴⁵

Structural violence is closely related to cultural violence and the term "ordinary," or "everyday," violence used by anthropologists Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman; all of these terms name a kind of entrenched violence embedded within cultural systems, symbols, practices, and ideas that are often difficult to identify because of their sheer pervasiveness.⁴⁶ There may be distinctions between structural, ordinary, and cultural violence that are important in

(Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 102–12; Pressler, *The View of Women Found in Deuteronomistic Family Laws* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1993).

43. Cheryl B. Anderson, *Women, Ideology, and Violence: Critical Theory and the Construction of Gender in the Book of the Covenant and the Deuteronomistic Law* (London: T&T Clark, 2004). See also Harold Bennett, *Injustice Made Legal: Deuteronomistic Law and the Plight of Widows, Strangers, and Orphans in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002). Bennett argues against the idea that biblical laws reflect only humanitarian concerns of ancient Israel, such as protection of widows and orphans in their condition of social vulnerability. Instead, Bennett argues that the law protects the interests of the powerful elite of society.

44. Anderson, *Women, Ideology, and Violence*, 10.

45. Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 9.

46. Das, *Life and Words*, 1–17; Arthur Kleinman, "The Violences of Everyday Life: The Multiple Forms and Dynamics of Social Violence," in *Violence and Subjectivity*, ed. Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Ramphele, and Pamela Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 226–41.

certain situations, but for my purposes here I categorize these types of violence together. For instance, Galtung came to see systemic and cultural violence as distinct, the former related to social structures and the later related to assumptions and prejudices that are used to justify and authorize those structures.⁴⁷ There may be times when it is important to distinguish between a system and the cultural justification for that system. My purpose, however, is to emphasize the mutually informing and dialogic connection between systems and the cultural symbols and ideology that support those systems. For instance, communities do not come to value male dominance and then create patriarchal systems that facilitate that dominance. Systems also teach the values of male dominance that individuals and communities come to accept and perform. Structures and the ways in which those structures are culturally reinforced and justified are deeply intertwined and connected.

One of the most significant ways that biblical scholars have recognized and addressed structural and cultural violence is to explore cultural assumptions about gender embedded within texts that also reflect violence. Especially in the study of masculinity in the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible, the connection between violence and gender has become an important lens through which to read texts.⁴⁸ Prophetic texts have received significant attention because the rhetorical strategy of the prophets sometimes utilizes violent images that are culturally cued to assumptions about gender.⁴⁹ Ezekiel and Hosea are especially of interest in this discussion because the prophets depict Israel as a victim of divine sexual assault in order to convey their prophetic messages, thereby reflecting and also reinforcing notions of God

47. Galtung, "Cultural Violence."

48. The following is an inexhaustive list of recent publications that address the connections between violence and masculinity in the Hebrew Bible: Susan Haddox, "Gendering Violence and Violating Gender in Judges 4–5," *Conversations with the Biblical World* 33 (2013): 67–81; Dennis T. Olson, "Untying the Knot?: Masculinity, Violence, and the Creation-Fall Story of Genesis 2–4," in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld*, ed. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 73–86; Cameron B. R. Howard, "Preaching Texts of Multiple Masculinities to a World of Multiple Masculinities," *Word & World* 36, no. 1 (2016): 74–81; Sara Koenig, "Make War Not Love: The Limits of David's Hegemonic Masculinity," *Biblical Interpretation* 23 (2015): 489–517.

49. Rhiannon Graybill, *Are We Not Men? Unstable Masculinity in the Hebrew Prophets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Franke and O'Brien, *Aesthetics of Violence in the Prophets*; Weems, *Battered Love*. For a thorough overview of the development of masculinity studies, see Susan Haddox, "Masculinity Studies of the Hebrew Bible: The First Two Decades," *Currents in Biblical Research* 14, no. 2 (2016): 176–206.

and Israel that rely upon gendered violence (Ezek. 16 and 23; Hos. 1–3).⁵⁰ More generally, scholars have studied the ways in which the very concept of ancient Near Eastern masculinity was reliant upon violence, both as skillful achievement on the battlefield and as skillful achievement of social, verbal, and interpersonal dominance.⁵¹ In my later discussion of violence in the Samson narrative, I take up this connection between masculinity and violence in my exploration of the ways in which ancient (and modern) notions of masculinity depend upon and involve violence in a multitude of forms.

Slow Violence

Slow violence conceptualizes a type of violence that manifests in the future but is nonetheless happening in the present, requiring senses other than sight in order to imagine what cannot be seen in the immediate moment. This discussion relies on Rob Nixon's work on slow environmental violence as it connects to impoverished communities. Nixon observes that it is often challenging for environmental writers and activists to communicate the urgency of environmental abuse because of the focus on sight as a privileged way of recognizing harm. Even though environmental abuse is implicated in structures of poverty and threat to human communities and results in perceptible violence against human beings over time, it is often gradual and lacks the spontaneous, spectacular demonstration of power that direct violence so often displays.⁵² Nixon identifies a need for readers who recognize the incremental nature of environmental violence against nature and humans, who recognize violence in the unseen future.⁵³

50. The following is an inexhaustive list of important publications related to the portrayal of gendered violence in Hosea and Ezekiel: Peggy L. Day, "The Bitch Had It Coming to Her: Rhetoric and Interpretation in Ezekiel 16," *Biblical Interpretation* 8, no. 3 (2000): 231–54; Linda Day, "Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezekiel 16," *Biblical Interpretation* 8, no. 3 (2000): 205–30; Mary E. Shields, "Gender and Violence in Ezekiel 23," *Society of Biblical Literature 1998 Seminar Papers* 37, part 1 (1998): 86–105; Bryan D. Bibb, "There's No Sex in Your Violence: Patriarchal Translation in Ezekiel 16 and 23," *Review & Expositor* 111, no. 4 (December 2014): 337–45; Renita J. Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor?" *Semeia* 47 (1989): 87–104; Tarlin, "Utopia and Pornography in Ezekiel."

51. Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare*; David J. A. Clines, "Being a Man in the Book of the Covenant," in *Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham*, ed. J. M. McConville and Karl Möller (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 3–9.

52. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 10.

53. Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 10.

The problem, according to Nixon, is that human beings tend to focus on violence as spectacle, zeroing in on explosive acts. Nixon's concept of slow violence confronts and corrects that tendency, focusing on violence that is catastrophic yet difficult to see in the moment.⁵⁴ Because of the glacial pace of environmental degradation, Nixon attempts to make more persuasive and perceptible violence that can only be imagined, not seen. Further, he challenges readers and interpreters to engage their imaginations in order to recognize the formless and obscure nature of violence that is often unrecognized in the moment but is nonetheless real and formative for individuals and communities. In relation to biblical texts, this theory of violence has tremendous potential because it allows readers to be accountable to forces of violence that register in the texts in ways that are not dramatized by spectacle but are accretive and emerge at a different pace.

Interpretive Violence

Interpretive violence differs from the categories I discuss above because it conceptualizes violence that is potentiated and authorized by interpretive practices and does not necessarily deal with depictions of violence within the text itself. A text need not be violent by any definition to contribute to violent social structures and enable violence to thrive in the lived worlds of human beings. Interpretive violence merits special consideration because of the unique kind of authority that the Bible has had as a sacred text of the Jewish and Christian traditions. Especially in the study of violence in biblical literature, it is important to recognize the ways that interpreters of sacred texts sometimes draw on the power and authority of those texts, consciously or unconsciously, to authorize violent personal and social practices. Understood in this way, the process of interpretation itself is like a potential weapon, with the capacity to enforce violence by virtue of the Bible's cultural and religious authority. From domestic abuse to acts of terrorism, the Bible has been used to legitimize and substantiate acts of violence against others.⁵⁵ Practices of interpretation *do* things in the world, and this category of violence enables readers to think of interpretation as an act with personal and social effects.

Stephen Haynes's work on the American use of Genesis 9, the story of Ham and Noah, to authorize American slavery is an excellent example of interpretive violence.⁵⁶ In the story, Noah becomes drunk. Ham discovers

54. Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 2.

55. For further discussion, see Robert P. Carroll, "Cultural Encroachment and Bible Translation: Observation on Elements of Violence, Race, and Class in the Production of Bibles in Translation," *Semeia* 76 (1996): 39–53.

56. Stephen Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

his father naked and asleep. Ham tells his brother Japheth about his father's state. Japheth and Shem approach Noah in a way that protects Noah's nakedness from their eyes; Ham sees his father's nakedness but his brothers do not. When Noah awakens, he realizes what has happened and curses Ham for seeing his nakedness, condemning Ham to servitude to his brothers because of his actions. The curse of Ham falls on his son Canaan and his posterity (Gen. 9:25). Upon first reading, the story of Ham and his father in Genesis 9 is not a remarkably violent story nor one that directly involves racial identity. However, as Haynes notes, this text was a staple of proslavery supporters in the pre-Civil War South. Theodore Weld, an antebellum abolitionist, affirmed as much when he remarked that "this prophecy of Noah is the *vade mecum* of slaveholders, and they never venture abroad without it."⁵⁷ To antebellum slaveholders and many readers of the Bible, this story supported and authorized slavery in an obvious way: in the context of Southern understandings of honor, family responsibility, and patriarchal control, that Ham saw his father drunk and naked and told his brothers about it was a shameful slight to Noah's honor. The curse of Ham was therefore not directly tied to Ham's ethnic or racial identity but to his lack of honor, evident in his disrespectful behavior toward the patriarch, his father, Noah. For advocates of slavery who had already constructed an identity for enslaved people that assumed their unruliness, debasement, and essential lack of ability to achieve honor, the connection between Ham and the enslaved population was obvious; it made sense to slaveholders and their supporters to associate Ham's lack of honor with those who lacked the opportunity for honor in their own society: enslaved people. The racialized reading of the Genesis story seemed to clearly reinforce already widely accepted notions of enslaved peoples' disorderly, and therefore dishonorable, natures. That this story says nothing explicit about slavery, race, or violence did not stop interpreters from employing it toward the most violent ends: the dehumanization of an entire population by the American institution of slavery.

Haynes's explication of the function of Genesis 9 illustrates how a text that is not self-evidently violent might come to be used for violent purposes in later cultural contexts. Texts do not have stable meanings but come to their meanings in the context of the dominant social concerns and ideological assumptions of particular communities. Any text, apparently, might be employed by readers for violent ends. Haynes's description of the social power of Genesis 9 also illustrates the dialogical nature of the interpretive act and puts into clear relief the role of the interpreters' ideological agenda as part of any examination of the ethical nature of reading. All readings are socially contingent. The

57. Theodore Dwight Weld, *The Bible against Slavery: An Inquiry into the Patriarchal and Mosaic Systems on the Subject of Human Rights*, 3rd ed. rev. (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), 46.

communities in which readers read, and their ideological assumptions and prejudices, are part of the interaction between text and reader.

Though I do not address in this book examples of violent social practices or institutions that receive support from interpretations of specific biblical texts, my attention to ethical reading of biblical violence is motivated by the idea that practices of interpretation have consequences in the communities in which humans live.⁵⁸ Sometimes those consequences are not direct and self-evident, such as with the use of Genesis 9 to authorize American slavery. Yet I assume a connection between interpretive practices of texts and the lived reality of people in communities.

Complicity as Violence

Similar to interpretive violence, the concept of complicity also extends the boundaries of violence beyond specific acts of physical harm. To be complicit, one need not be directly involved in an act of violence.⁵⁹ Complicity is when individuals and communities give assent to violent acts or cultures of violence through acts, words, or passivity. In a different way than the category of interpretive violence, complicity focuses on the failure of individuals and communities within textual worlds or in everyday life to recognize, confront, and resist violence in large and small ways.

Historian Robert Ericksen's analysis of the roles of the Christian church and the German university system in the Holocaust is instructive. Today, the events of the Holocaust and the anti-Semitism of the Nazi party are easily categorized as horrific violence.⁶⁰ But what were the theological and cultural conditions that made the violence of the Holocaust possible? Ericksen's argument is that the Holocaust happened in an anti-Semitic culture that extended beyond a particular group of Nazis and Nazi-sympathizers. According to Ericksen, Christian intellectual and religious leaders contributed to the theological and social conditions that enabled anti-Semitism to thrive and were therefore complicit in the violence of the Holocaust even if they did not commit any acts of direct or immediate violence. Some Christians endorsed Nazi ideology and are obviously complicit in Nazi actions. The concept of complicity, however, includes those who enabled Nazi ideology to flourish through their failure to confront and resist that ideology:

58. See also Cheryl B. Anderson, "Biblical Interpretation as Violence: Genesis 19 and Judges 19 in the Context of HIV and AIDS," in *La Violencia and the Hebrew Bible: The Politics and Histories of Biblical Hermeneutics on the American Continent*, ed. Susanne Scholz and Pablo R. Andúñach (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016), 121–36.

59. Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 22–23.

60. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 22.

Is “complicity” too strong a word to tie to these Christians in Nazi Germany? I have not described any one of them pulling a trigger or releasing pellets of Zyklon B. When no major Christian institution, from the Confessing Church to the German Catholic bishops to the Vatican, could find itself willing to condemn Nazi mistreatment of Jews, why would Christians be held back in their participation? I am not certain ordinary Germans would have participated so willingly and ruthlessly in the killing without what appeared to be religious sanction to do so.⁶¹

In his investigation of the ways the Christian church and the institutions of higher education in Germany explicitly and implicitly affirmed anti-Semitism, Ericksen extends the boundaries of violence to include the acts and non-acts of intellectual and theological formation that empowered the violent culture of anti-Semitism.

Ericksen does not explicitly offer a hermeneutical lens through which to read the Bible, but I see several ways that the concept of complicity may be used to explore violence in biblical texts. The first way is to ask about the conditions, characters, or assumptions that enable violence to thrive unresisted and unchallenged within the textual narrative. What kind of violence is simply taken for granted as normal, and what enables that sense of ordinary violence to thrive unresisted? This theory of violence overlaps with the concept of structural or everyday violence, but the focus here is on violence that is not challenged but silently accepted. The idea of complicity as violence brings into focus characters in the Bible who do not actively carry out acts of violence but who nonetheless have a role in the construction of violent environments.

Complicity as violence can also point toward violence beyond the bounds of the textual world, in the arena of interpretation. In this way, a theory of violence as complicity intersects with a theory of violence as interpretive practice, when such interpretive practices facilitate complicit violence in the worlds in which readers live. Ericksen’s theory of complicity elucidates how habitual interpretive practices can create and maintain systems of vulnerability and danger. The concept of complicity enables readers of biblical violence to critically approach systems of violence within the text as well as habits of interpretation that capacitate violent actions in their lived experience and worlds and ask such questions as: What kind of world does a particular interpretation make possible? Who benefits from a particular interpretation, and who might be harmed?

61. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 137–38.

Trauma and Moral Injury

In this book, I am intentionally connecting violence, in the many ways it is conceptualized, with the consequences of that violence. The study of trauma as it has influenced ancient Israelite texts is one of the primary ways that scholars have addressed the effects of violence. Scholars have used trauma theory in a wide variety of ways to elucidate the dynamics of textual production related to the experience of violence, as well as the representation of violence and resultant suffering within biblical texts.⁶² Within biblical studies, trauma theory initially provided a way to explore the experience of the Babylonian exile and its political, religious, physical, and psychological consequences for the people of Judah.⁶³ Trauma theory has evolved as an approach, however, and has offered an important lens through which to read a wide variety of texts, including biblical stories of sexual assault, wisdom literature, and the lament traditions of the Psalms and the book of Lamentations.⁶⁴ Trauma provides an important way for readers to become more attuned to the way that experiences of violence exert power over individuals and communities in ways that shape their sense of safety, produce lasting feelings of fear, guilt, and shame, and reconstitute identities formed in the crucible of physical and psychic pain.

62. David G. Garber, Jr., "Trauma Theory and Biblical Studies," *Currents in Biblical Research* 14, no. 1 (Oct 2015): 24–44; Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, eds., *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016); T. M. Lemos, "The Apotheosis of Rage: Divine Anger and the Psychology of Israelite Trauma," *Biblical Interpretation* 23, no. 1 (2015): 101–21; Daniel L. Smith Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002); David Janzen, *The Violent Gift: Trauma's Subversion of the Deuteronomistic History's Narrative* (London: T&T Clark, 2012); David Janzen, *Trauma and the Failure of History: Kings, Lamentations, and the Destruction of Jerusalem* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019).

63. See especially, David Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins*, 2014.

64. See L. Juliana M. Claassens, "Trauma and Recovery: A New Hermeneutical Framework for the Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13)," in *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, 177–92; Gerald O. West, "Between Text and Trauma: Reading Job with People Living with HIV," in *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, 209–30; Elizabeth Boase, "Fragmented Voices: Collective Identity and Traumatization in Lamentations," in *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, 49–66; Christopher G. Frechette, "Destroying the Internalized Perpetrator: A Healing Function of the Violent Language Against Enemies in the Psalms," in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, *Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica* 2, ed. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, Else Holt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Academic, 2014), 71–84; Amy C. Cottrill, "The Traumatized 'I' in Psalm 102: A Feminist Biblical Theology of Suffering," in *After Exegesis: Feminist Biblical Theology*, ed. Patricia K. Tull and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 171–86.

The concept of moral injury focuses on another aspect of the effects of violence. Though not a new experience by any means, moral injury has recently gained significant attention among psychologists and ethicists as a way to identify a kind of trauma among soldiers and veterans of war that is related to post-traumatic stress but is also somewhat different.⁶⁵ Moral injury refers to the deleterious effects of participation in the violence of warfare, whether through direct violence, witnessing acts of violence that one cannot or does not stop, or supporting acts of war that one later understands to be a betrayal of other core moral convictions. Moral injury expands the idea of the effects of violence to include those who commit acts of war, or who support those acts, and come to feel intense shame, guilt, and remorse at having participated in harmful or deadly acts, no matter the acts' status as legal or socially sanctioned. While post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) typically pertains to victims of violence, moral injury conceptualizes the effects of violence to include those who perpetrate acts of war and experience traumatic effects because of a sense of betrayal of core values that stand in tension with those acts of violence. Related to the concept of complicity as violence, moral injury provides a way of recognizing that one painful effect of warfare, especially for veterans but perhaps also for those who witness or make possible a particular war from a distance, is the experience of living with the knowledge of one's self as someone who has participated in violence in ways that do not accord with one's sense of justice. How do individuals and communities explain to themselves and others their own violence, especially in situations in which that violence stands in tension with other ethical values and commitments? Moral injury provides a way to explore this question.

65. For further discussion of moral injury from a clinical psychology perspective, see Kent D. Drescher, David W. Foy, Caroline Kelly, Anna Leshner, Kerrie Schutz, and Brett Litz, "An Exploration of the Viability and Usefulness of the Construct of Moral Injury in War Veterans," *Traumatology* 17 (2011): 8–13; Brett Litz, Nathan Stein, Eileen Delaney, Leslie Lebowitz, William P. Nash, Caroline Silva, Shira Maguen, "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy," *Clinical Psychology Review* 29 (2009): 695–706; William P. Nash and Brett T. Litz, "Moral Injury: A Mechanism for War-Related Psychological Trauma in Military Family Members," *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 16 (2013): 365–75; Kent D. Drescher and David W. Foy, "When They Come Home: Posttraumatic Stress, Moral Injury, and Spiritual Consequences for Veterans," *Reflective Practice* 28 (2008): 85–102; Jacob K. Farnsworth, Kent D. Drescher, Jason A. Nieuwsma, Robyn B. Walser, and Joseph M. Currier, "The Role of Moral Emotions in Military Trauma: Implications for the Study and Treatment of Moral Injury," *Review of General Psychology* 18, no. 4 (2014): 249–62. For an excellent overview of the way moral injury has been employed in recent studies of biblical literature, see Brad Kelle, "Moral Injury and Biblical Studies: An Early Sampling of Research and Emerging Trends," *Currents in Biblical Research* 19, no. 2 (2021): 121–44.

It makes sense that a group of texts that has as a central theme warfare and its aftermath, such as the Hebrew Bible, would also contain texts that evidence awareness of the ethical implications of participating in war for individuals and communities.⁶⁶ At times, biblical narratives reflect awareness, conscious and perhaps unconscious, of the effects of violent acts on those who perpetrate them.⁶⁷ Those moments evidence awareness of complicity in violence, knowledge of the effects of violence on others, and willingness to acknowledge, even for brief moments, the ways that violence has done harm to others even if that same act of violence is ultimately affirmed as necessary or even celebrated. The concept of moral injury therefore helps readers to recognize the effects of violence on all parties who are proximate to it, the seepage of violent acts into the realities of victims and perpetrators—who might sometimes be the same—as well as the role of witnesses to acts of violence who come to understand themselves as morally implicated by their action or inaction.

Constructive Violence

I take the term “constructive violence” from Caryn Reeder’s discussion of the laws of family violence in Deuteronomy (see, for example, Deut. 13:6–11; 21:18–21; 22:13–21).⁶⁸ Reeder observes that, read with a hermeneutic of suspicion, some biblical scholars have found in the laws of family violence evidence of the dangerous patriarchal culture of the ancient Hebrews and the tendency of the biblical texts to “encourage oppression, suppression, and abuse among

66. Attention to moral injury is also receiving scholarly attention in other bodies of literature. In fact, psychologist Jonathan Shay, who coined the term “moral injury,” uses narratives of warriors in the Iliad and the Odyssey to explore this phenomenon in his treatment of Vietnam veterans. Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Jonathan Shay, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (New York: Scribner, 2002).

67. Joseph McDonald, ed., *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2017); Brad E. Kelle, “Moral Injury and the Interdisciplinary Study of Biblical War Texts: The Case of King Saul,” in *Worship, Women, and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch*, Brown Judaic Studies 357, ed. John J. Collins, Saul Olyan and T. M. Lemos (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2015), 147–72; Brad E. Kelle, *The Bible and Moral Injury: Reading Scripture Alongside War’s Unseen Wounds* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2020); Brad E. Kelle, “Postwar Rituals of Return and Reintegration,” in *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Jacob L. Wright, Frank Ritzel Ames, and Brad E. Kelle (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 205–41.

68. Caryn A. Reeder, *The Enemy in the Household: Family Violence in Deuteronomy and Beyond* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012). Reeder borrows the term “constructive violence” from Robert R. Beck, *Nonviolent Story: Narrative Conflict Resolution in the Gospel of Mark* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), xiv, 4–9.

their readers.”⁶⁹ The laws that authorize the stoning of disobedient sons and daughters, encountered in this light, have been considered by some critics as evidence of dysfunctional family systems or the particular cruelty of the Bible.

Reeder, however, examines these legal texts with a hermeneutic of trust rather than one of suspicion. Instead of approaching the text skeptically, a trusting reader assumes that the people who constructed and were addressed by these laws loved their children, did not wish them unnecessary harm, and desired for them wholeness and well-being. Read in this light, the laws of family violence express the desire of the community to incorporate their children into the covenant, the best and most loving gift that the community offers. As Reeder argues, the covenant depended upon all individuals maintaining it; a child’s disobedience endangered that child and the whole community. According to the covenantal theology of Deuteronomy, worship of God above all else is at the center of human life. For the good of children and the whole community, children must be taught the absolute value of that covenant. The laws of family violence, as Reeder calls them, prioritize the covenant over parental attachment to children and structure a social and theological world that facilitates that covenant.

Though these laws do not correspond with modern notions of parenting or individual human rights, according to Reeder they were part of the construction of a community of faithfulness to covenant. Reeder does not deny the violence of these texts, but her argument is that these laws were “useful for the community,” and were therefore constructive.⁷⁰ It is only in a world that values individual rights over the communal identity of faithfulness in covenant (the inverse of the community of Deuteronomy posited by covenantal theology) that these laws would be seen as perverse or inhumanely violent. Reeder grants the violence of these texts and asks the reader to recognize the larger theological purpose of that violence as it was conceived in the ancient context. Her goal is not to offer apology for the violence of these texts but to contextualize the texts in their ancient world and complicate modern interpretations of them.

One need not affirm the specific content of the laws of family violence, or even believe that the Israelites actually enacted these laws, to see the importance of Reeder’s argument. Especially in a context of threat to one’s

69. Reeder, *The Enemy in the Household*, 11. Reeder identifies the following works in this context: Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Carol Delaney, *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Hector Avalos, *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2005).

70. Reeder, *The Enemy in the Household*, 9.

theological integrity and physical survival, like that often experienced by the ancient Israelites, the preservation of community through laws of intimidation and threat may have been perceived as necessary and desirable. Violent rhetoric as a tool of internal identity-construction and articulation of community ideals is a facet that merits sympathetic as well as skeptical scrutiny on the part of the reader. Verbal violence and threat may be a particularly powerful form of theological language that served a constructive purpose in its historical context, according to Reeder. In the modern context, recognizing the historical context of the verbal violence may enable readers to also recognize the historical contingency of all theological language. Such historical awareness can equip readers to contend with the assumptions operative in today's world that create dissonance and even shock when they encounter ancient laws that reflect radically different communal values and theories of the person.

My intent in this discussion of various approaches to violence is to offer readers a set of concepts and vocabulary that expands their ability to recognize and name more features of the experience of violence and its representation in the Bible. But beyond helping readers to name these forms of violence, it is important to explore how these texts shape readers' sensitivities, perceptions, and sensibilities. This requires an explication of approaches to the representation of violence in the biblical texts within an ethical framework. Alongside the ability to recognize more about violence, readers require a strategy of reading that does justice to the complexity of violence and the way it transforms readers' ethical imaginations. In the next section, I discuss models of reading and ethics and how those models facilitate different kinds of reading practices and ethical reflection about violence.

END OF EXCERPT

