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### Teaching Rape, Slavery, And Genocide In Bible And Culture

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## *Chapter Three*

# **Teaching Rape, Slavery, and Genocide in Bible and Culture**

Gwynn Kessler

What—and where—is the line between pedagogy and activism? Such a question strikes me as simultaneously naive and taboo, necessary and beside the point at the same time. Better, probably, to consider the *relationship between* pedagogy and activism, where and how each informs the other, and to reckon honestly with the complex relationships, possible tensions, and muddled waters between them rather than query hard and fast lines.

In the spring of 2016, I offered a course called “Rape, Slavery, and Genocide in Bible and Culture.” A number of cultural currents were sweeping across, or at least gaining ground, in the United States in the few years leading up to the class (and of course many years prior). Such currents may be exemplified by, just to name some of the more well-known, the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement (2013) in response to the increasing awareness of the frequency of racially motivated police brutality and killings, the publication of Ta-Nehisi Coates’s article “The Case for Reparations” (2014), the letters by the Office for Civil Rights at the Department of Education published in 2011 and 2014 about Title IX procedures, and the release of *The Hunting Ground* (2015), a documentary about sexual assault on college campuses. On the global front, wars were being fought during these years, many still ongoing, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, and Gaza, with direct or tacit U.S. involvement. On a more personal level, I had been placed on the Sexual Misconduct Task Force at Swarthmore College that was formed in 2013 and served as one of two faculty members on that committee from then until 2015; at the time of this writing, the report we authored and the recommendations we made remain largely unheeded, as students are currently, once again, speaking out against the administration’s

lack of consistent, transparent, and effective ways to acknowledge, confront and combat sexual violence on campus.

My course "Rape, Slavery, and Genocide in Bible and Culture" was designed as an upper-level seminar, and it comprised seven students, of diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds and affiliations, as well as differing ethnicities, races, socio-economic backgrounds, and gender identities. The course readings and discussion were primarily focused on the Hebrew Bible, but some readings about New Testament texts were incorporated.<sup>1</sup> Our class meetings were discussion based, and students shared reactions and reflections about the assigned readings; we also examined primary biblical texts in class, applying the secondary readings to the texts and then interpreting the texts in multiple ways as the class session progressed. Two of the students went on to write senior theses that emerged from readings and discussions in the class, and at least two were active in campus discussions, organizing, and journalism around Title IX issues on campus.

There were, as is often the case, many reasons as well as numerous goals embedded in such a "timely" course offering. Part of this essay is devoted to rendering such motivations and goals transparent in order to reflect upon them retrospectively, with some more depth and perhaps the clarity of hindsight. I also consider how such goals might be better seen as bringing into sharper relief, as opposed to standing in stark contrast to, the goals that I set for other, not quite as explicitly topical, timely, or "relevant" classes that I regularly offer about the Bible and religion more generally. But the bulk of this essay focuses on examining three texts from the biblical book of Deuteronomy that we read together on the first day of class in order to begin to examine "what the Bible says" about rape, slavery, and genocide and how these texts illuminate their interconnectedness.

At the outset, it was—and remains—important to be clear that the class did not aim to locate the cause of, or the blame for, certain of our current culture's struggles with sexual violence, racism, and genocide in the Bible itself. Much of the Bible's influence on U.S. culture, while I do think such influence exists, is simply too hard to pin down in any facile, straightforward, manner. However, the course did aim to provide a place where current occurrences of sexual violence, framed as an outgrowth of misogyny and structural sexism, and racial violence, understood as an outgrowth of white supremacy and persistent systemic racism, could be critically examined and discussed. Thus the course did not expect that we bracket contemporary debates in our discussions about biblical texts. Rather it sought to integrate—though not conflate—textual materials from another time and place with contemporary cultural realities that both we and our students confront. Ultimately, I hoped the class would "work" on multiple levels; I wanted us to "think with" the Bible about contemporary violence, to begin the work of historicizing it, and use contemporary discourses about violence to "think the Bible." For, as

Regina Schwartz has warned, "if we do not think about the Bible, it will think (for) us."<sup>2</sup>

The specific objectives for the course that I listed on the syllabus included introducing students to the academic study of the Bible as well as to the general topic of violence and religion and, more specifically, violence and the Bible. I also specified some of the components of what I consider to be part of the academic study of the Bible: introducing students to the background and historical context of biblical texts and developing critical reading skills for primary (biblical) and secondary (scholarly) sources. Other course objectives listed included exposure to the complexity of the Bible and its legacy for today, exploration of possible connections between biblical texts and contemporary culture, and finally, the development of skills for discussing challenging topics in sensitive, sophisticated, and nuanced ways.<sup>3</sup>

What strikes me about these course objectives upon looking back is, on the one hand, their timidity, their partialness bordering on incompleteness, and even their blandness. In certain ways such course objectives stand in tension with the boldness of the course title. I had dismissed, at the planning stage of the class, naming the course "The Bible and Violence" or "Violence and Religion"; there is, I decided, a power, as well as a necessity, in naming specific types of violence. Furthermore, in simultaneously singling out specific types of violence yet stringing them together—rape, slavery, genocide—the course title conjures what I saw as a foundational objective of the course, though it is not explicitly listed: to consider the connections between violence on a more personal, individual scale and violence on a collective, species, and massive scale. Also missing from the stated course objectives is the interrogation of the hierarchical binary between human(s) and animal(s), which formed the basis of some of the last assigned readings in the section about genocide at the end of the course. Indeed, rethinking, by which I mean challenging and ultimately exposing a number of hierarchical binaries—between human and animal, male and female, enslaved and free, Israelite and non-Israelite, us and them—as potential acts of violence in and of themselves, remained absent from my specified course objectives. And, of course, nowhere is it mentioned that what I wanted to do, through or along with the academic study of the (Hebrew) Bible, was help students articulate, or if need be locate, and reckon with, their anger, their outrage, at the injustices pervasive in our culture, and to begin to account for our complicity in such structures. Better to play it safe, to at least conform and comport what is, after all, an academic endeavor to the still powerful illusion that there exist dispassionate, "objective," objectives to courses, that knowledge—either its acquisition or its transmission—is itself objective.

On the other hand, a second look at the stated course objectives, while partial or even incomplete, might reveal that they are neither timid nor bland. Studying the Bible academically, which entails, among numerous other

things, questioning assumptions about biblical authorship, inerrancy, consistency, universality, timelessness, even Truth, and especially historical accuracy and objectivity, is perhaps in and of itself both a challenging and lofty goal. In a college classroom, studying the Bible entails confronting a text that many have only experienced in religious settings, and others, even if they have no prior knowledge of the Bible, assume to be of religious import, in a critical, secular setting. Studying the Bible academically, unmoored from prior religious teaching and/or distanced from an aura of "the sacred/the holy," is therefore, I submit, neither a simple, nor timid endeavor. It involves questions of no less import and urgency than those of agency and authority; it demands an awareness of social location and situatedness,<sup>4</sup> those of the contemporary reader(s) as well as those of the ancient text(s).

Teaching the Bible academically means helping our students activate, and I think ultimately increase, their agency as critical readers, thinkers, and inhabitants of and participants in society. Such increased agency embeds within it not only questions of meaning(s)—what does any given biblical text *mean* (and we must add to whom)—but also questions of authority—*who decides*. Beginning to answer such questions requires that students engage the texts and confront them as directly as possible. Since I teach the Bible in English translation, directly engaging the text means re-inscribing the act of reading as an active, dynamic, and complex, process, or relationship, between text and reader, reader and text, as well as readers, texts, and cultures—past and present. Critical reading begins when one asks, "The text says this?!" or "This is in the Bible?!" or even, "This is the Bible?!" It continues when one asks how is this—this text, passage, book—to be understood and interpreted.

One of the strategies useful in the academic study of the Bible, shared with ethnography and religious studies more generally, is commonly described as rendering the strange familiar and the familiar strange. Academic, critical study of the Bible begins with a willingness to distance oneself from their assumptions, preconceptions, prior beliefs, and expectations. This works from different angles for different students. If one believes that the Bible is the word of God, or divinely inspired, or that it is central to their identities, one should re-situate themselves in relation to these beliefs; if a student believes that the Bible is made up stories, "make-believe," always and only harmful, and irrelevant for their lives and even identities, they too need to imagine otherwise. The academic study of the Bible—as education in general—is not about staying within our "comfort zones"—all the more so when the texts represent, and seem to justify, violence.

On the first day of class, after the familiar ritual of reading over the syllabus is completed, I distributed a handout with three excerpts from the biblical book of Deuteronomy. It is my invitation to the students to ask "This is (in) the Bible?!" The "strangeness" of the passages strikes, I hope, on

multiple levels, from the de-centering of better known biblical stories to the focus on less known biblical laws, to the differing types of violence that appear in the passages, and further, to the shared elements that intersect among the passages. Of course, these texts were only a partial, far from complete, selection of what one may find on the topics of rape, slavery, and genocide in the Bible. (And of course, texts that extol the virtues of peace, shared responsibility and care for other beings and the land are not represented at all.) But as I hope to show, they offer one fruitful opening to learning and inquiry about the central topics of the course as well as studying the Bible academically.

### Deuteronomy 7:1–11

<sup>1</sup>When the Lord your God brings you to the land that you are about to enter and possess, and he dislodges many nations before you—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations much larger than you—<sup>2</sup>and the Lord your God delivers them to you and you defeat them, you must doom them to destruction: grant them no terms and give them no-quarter. <sup>3</sup>You shall not intermarry with them: do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. <sup>4</sup>For they will turn your children away from Me to worship other gods, and the Lord's anger will blaze forth against you and he will promptly wipe you out. <sup>5</sup>Instead, this is what you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, smash their pillars, cut down their sacred posts, and consign their images to the fire. <sup>6</sup>For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God: of all the peoples on earth the Lord your God chose you to be his treasured people. <sup>7</sup>It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you—indeed, you are the smallest of peoples; <sup>8</sup>but it was because the Lord favored you and kept the oath he made to your fathers that the Lord freed you with a mighty hand and rescued you from the house of enslavement (*bayt avadim*), from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. <sup>9</sup>Know, therefore, that only the Lord your God is God, the steadfast God who keeps his covenant faithfully to the thousandth generation of those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>10</sup>but who instantly requites with destruction those who reject him—never slow with those who reject him, but requiting them instantly. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, observe faithfully the Instruction—the laws and the rules—with which I charge you today.

### Deuteronomy 15:12–17

<sup>12</sup>If a fellow Hebrew, man or woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you (*v'avadekha*) six years, and in the seventh year you shall set him free. <sup>13</sup>When you set him free, do not let him go empty-handed: <sup>14</sup>Furnish him out of the flock, threshing floor, and vat, with which the Lord your God has blessed you. <sup>15</sup>Remember that you were a slave (*eved*) in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I enjoin this commandment upon you today. <sup>16</sup>But should he say to you, "I do not want to leave you"—for he loves you and your household and things go well for him with you—<sup>17</sup>you shall take an

awl and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall become your slave (*eved*) in perpetuity. Do the same with your female slave (*l'amatkha*).

### Deuteronomy 21:10–14

<sup>10</sup>When you go out to war against your enemies, and the Lord your God delivers them into your hands and you take some of them captive, <sup>11</sup>and you see among the captives a beautiful woman and you desire her and would take her to wife, <sup>12</sup>you shall bring her into your house, and she shall trim her hair, pare her nails, <sup>13</sup>and discard her captive's garb. She shall spend a month's time in your house lamenting her father and mother; after that you can come to her and possess her, and she shall be your wife. <sup>14</sup>Then, should you no longer want her, you must release her outright. You must not sell her for money; you shall not treat her as a slave (*lo titamer bah*)<sup>5</sup> because you have afflicted her (*initah*).<sup>6</sup>

These texts serve a number of pedagogical purposes. As mentioned above, they introduce students to one possibly “strange” aspect of biblical texts—their presentation as “law.” These texts are immediately disarming, and perhaps confusing, to *some* readers, especially those who might expect a biblical text to be more obviously narrative in structure.<sup>7</sup> Who are the characters, the protagonists? What is the context? How are these laws to be understood as part of the unfolding story of Israel and God? In other words, how do we situate, read, engage, and understand biblical laws and their scope? And then there's the violence in the texts, sometimes seemingly erupting off the page with excessive force and at other times almost muted if not hidden, buried, or silenced in the text—but no less potent. What is the relationship between violence and “the sacred”? How does violence function in the Bible? Do these texts, does the Bible, justify, *authorize*, violence—genocide, slavery, rape? These are perhaps the questions that initially arise. But the academic study of the Bible demands, and thus promises, more.

The passages on the handout are presented in the order they appear in Deuteronomy, but this ordering also renders legible different types of violence—moving from the more explicit to the more implicit and even hidden.<sup>8</sup> Thus Deuteronomy 7 begins with divinely commanded genocidal violence; Israel is commanded to utterly destroy seven nations, to “tear down their altars,” “smash their pillars,” “cut down their sacred posts,” and “burn their images.” If Israel does not “doom to destruction” these seven nations, then God's rage will strike at Israel, destroying the Israelites instead. Deuteronomy 15 shifts from the earlier chapter's depiction of national war and ethnic destruction to a setting of domesticity; its violence is more muted and yet pervasive. The violence in this text resides in a social structure where people can be purchased and freed—not of their own accord—as well as in the bodily harm done to the slave, “the piercing of the ear into the door.” Finally,

Deuteronomy 21 brings us to both the battlefield and the home; here genocide and domesticity in the previous excerpts meet.<sup>9</sup> A captured beautiful woman is brought into her captor's house, to be "married" and then to remain or be cast out—according to her captor's whim. Here the violence in the text, that the woman is taken against her will and raped<sup>10</sup> until her master<sup>11</sup> tires of her, is almost completely hidden. The woman is utterly silent, her consent not only rendered irrelevant but seemingly unimaginable to the biblical author(s).<sup>12</sup>

My primary goal in introducing these texts is not simply to elicit certain reactions from the students—"this is (in) the Bible?," "where and when do violence and religion intersect?"—but to broaden our understanding of violence and what counts as violence.<sup>13</sup> If the genocidal violence of Deuteronomy 7 appears self-evident, how does one come to recognize the other two passages (and many others) as also containing, even brimming with, violence? How do we learn to recognize structural oppression and its silencing as violence—in texts and in our culture?

By structural violence I mean the very presumption of the texts (Deut. 15; Deut. 21) that people can be bought, sold, and owned, or women can be captured and raped, kept, or discarded, as a matter of course. That the texts are presented as law and thus presented as authoritative, encourages readers to read them passively, accepting these laws, at least initially, with little or no question. Since readers are less likely to question such texts, they are also less likely to see them as the mechanisms of structural oppression, which I am framing as (a type of) violence.

Framing these texts as containing violence—both in that systems of oppression are embedded in and produced by the texts and that to some extent this violence is contained through the medium of legal discourse—invites further inquiry into these texts. In fact, framing the texts as violence beckons deeper engagement, questioning, and even some inevitable pushback against this very framing.

Students might point out that Deuteronomy 15:12–17, for example, sets a term limit on how long one can be enslaved, and further, it dictates that the enslaved person, when freed, cannot be sent forth empty-handed. A case for reparations indeed.<sup>14</sup> Further still, the enslaved person, in some instances and as if on their own accord, might declare, "I do not want to leave you." All of this is correct, and yet, these "benevolent" sounding provisions do not abrogate that the text assumes and (re)produces a system where people can be purchased, owned, and then freed (or discarded)—by someone else. How are we to read the enslaved person's declaration that they do not want to leave? The narrative adds, or the narrator supplies, the stated reasons: he loves his owner and his owner's house, and things are better for him if he remains—but how reliable is this report?<sup>15</sup> Even if reliable, to what extent is an enslaved person free to choose to remain enslaved, or is it only the recognition



of and capitulation to a system of oppression that makes this the most viable “choice”? Finally, we should ask about this passage’s limited scope of concern for the treatment of enslaved “kinsmen”; the passage only legislates the ownership of Israelites, or Hebrews, who are enslaved by other Israelites. How does biblical law legislate the ownership and treatment of non-Israelite enslaved peoples? Thus Deuteronomy 15:12–17 serves as an opening to other biblical texts that will be encountered over the course of the semester that discuss non-Israelite enslaved people in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Exodus 21; Leviticus 25).

Having asked these questions, noting that these texts are only some of many and beginning to acknowledge that our own assumption that it is wrong to enslave people might be operating in our own readings, we have engaged with the text more deeply. And, having acknowledged some of our limitations regarding textual materials and our own situated positions, we are in a better position to examine what the underlying assumptions of a society that condones such a system might be—our disagreement placed at some distance. (Of course, this will require more than three biblical texts and more than one introductory class period.)

Furthermore, having engaged with Deuteronomy 15 more deeply, we are able to compare it with Deuteronomy 21 to deepen our engagement with that text as well. In contrast to the enslaved Hebrew, male or female, who speaks—whether or not reliably so—the non-Israelite captive woman is utterly silent. Deuteronomy 21 affords her no opportunity to speak. Indeed, what would she say, we might ask.<sup>16</sup> Given that Deuteronomy 21:10–14 is most commonly framed as legislation about the “marriage” of captive women, we might then begin to query some of the commonalities between this and other “marriage laws.” If a woman could not consent to marriage, it being conceived of as a transaction between men,<sup>17</sup> are instances of what we would call rape far more pervasive in biblical Israel than imagined and imaginable? Again, these are questions to be explored far beyond one, two, or even three texts and one introductory class session.

More germane to my point, in this article and on the first day of class, is to consider the intertextual resonances and thematic connections between Deuteronomy 15 and 21, and ultimately Deuteronomy 7, which allow us to think slavery, rape, and genocide together. As part of this thinking, we should ask, what are the apparent connections between the captured, raped woman who is taken in “marriage” and the enslaved person who is purchased with money? What does it mean when Deut. 21:14 insists of the discarded woman, “you shall not treat her as a slave since you have afflicted her”? Are both people not suffering from structural oppression and violence? Are they not both treated more as property than persons? Shifting the question from whether or not (captured) women and enslaved peoples *are* property to how they are treated as such moves us away from that still debated question;<sup>18</sup> it

simultaneously moves us closer to a performative conception of identities and allows us to see how the performance of violent acts by adult male Israelites (and biblical law itself) is foundational to the identity of adult male Israelites (and biblical law as well). Finally, do both (captured) women and enslaved peoples exemplify and suffer “social death”?<sup>19</sup>

“Social death” is a concept characterized by violence, separation from one’s larger culture, and the alienation from and loss of intergenerational links—those between the socially dead’s ancestors and their progeny, their past and future.<sup>20</sup> The concept as related to enslaved peoples has developed from the work of Orlando Patterson; it has been broadened and used in the field of Genocide and Holocaust Studies and further developed to include other marginalized peoples, genders, and ethnicities.<sup>21</sup> In what follows, I mobilize this broader usage in order to explore some possible links between enslaved Israelites and captured women in the biblical texts I have been discussing.<sup>22</sup>

The recognition of the social death of the captured woman and the enslaved Israelite in Deuteronomy 15 and 21, respectively, provides an additional broad thematic link, beyond that of the violence they share, between these chapters and Deuteronomy 7. For Deuteronomy 7, while prescribing genocide, demonstrates how genocide and social death coincide. Claudia Card, in her work which explores the connections between genocide and social death, writes, “Social death is not necessarily genocide. But genocide is social death” (2010: 237).<sup>23</sup> She further writes, “Putting social death at the center of genocide takes the focus off body counts” (2010: 238). It shifts our sole or at least primary focus from the killing of people(s) in genocide to include the destruction of their cultural markers and ways of life. Both types of destruction are prescribed in Deuteronomy 7.

Deuteronomy 7 clearly prescribes total destruction and death to the seven nations: “You must doom them to destruction: you shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them” (7:2).<sup>24</sup> Perhaps, however, acknowledging that there are always survivors,<sup>25</sup> and that total destruction requires more than dead bodies, it continues, “you shall tear down their altars, smash their images, cut down their Asherim, and burn their carved idols” (7:5). That which is prescribed in Deuteronomy 7 is both physical and social death. Our reading of the social death suffered by enslaved person and captured woman in Deuteronomy 15 and 21 enhances and deepens our reading of Deuteronomy 7, encouraging us, not to look away from the physical death prescribed, but to look further and see the destruction of specifically religio-cultural aspects of these nations: their altars and their gods.

In fact, we need not choose whether physical or social death is more central, but the text allows us, on one reading, to imagine that the religio-cultural aspects are key motivating factors for the destruction. The fear expressed in the text is that, through intermarrying, the foreign daughters will

lead the sons astray from following God to the worship of other gods (7:4) and that as a consequence, God will destroy Israel (7:4). Israel then, risks suffering both social death, in that through the worship of other gods they will lose their culture and “religion”—their links to their past ways and its future—and physical death as well, in that God will destroy Israel, “with haste,” according to the text.

In addition to the broad thematic link between Deuteronomy 7, 15, and 21 through the shared theme of social death, there are some more specific connections that also become apparent when the texts are read together. As just mentioned, Deut. 7:4 discusses the exchange of women, here daughters. Deuteronomy 7:3 states, “And you shall not make marriages with them; your daughter you shall not give to his son, nor his daughter shall you take to your son.”

In other biblical texts that deal with genocide, including Deut. 20:13–15,<sup>26</sup> Numbers 31, Judges 21, and, as seen already in Deut. 21,<sup>27</sup> women are expected to be taken as part of war. Yet Deut. 7:4 (and Deut. 20:16–17) explicitly forbid taking the women of these seven nations. Still, that these texts proscribe the taking of these women while prescribing genocide demonstrates that under other circumstances, women are taken and married—without their (or their fathers’) consent. Thus Deuteronomy 7 acknowledges, here through its negation, certain connections between genocide, gender, and sexual violence. If we read the text complacently, or passively, without slowing down, engaging with it, and asking questions of it, the assumption that the text makes that other women are taken as part of the spoils of war could pass unnoticed, the gendered violence of genocide subsumed by and subordinated to the more explicit or obvious violence of total destruction. But having examined Deut. 21:10–14, noting the fate of the captive woman, her silencing and the systemic oppression and violence that are encoded in that text, we have become, or are on our way to becoming, better readers of biblical texts.

Becoming better readers of the biblical text involves reading along with, and against, the narrator or the text. It entails acknowledging that the narrator/text has a perspective, and we do best to read both with—and against—this perspective. It includes asking who is silenced in, and by, the text. It encourages us to read from different, often competing, perspectives.<sup>28</sup> These are all aspects of the academic study of the Bible that are introduced, yet surely not fully digested, on the first day of class through our engagement with just three excerpts from Deuteronomy. But I want to circle back to the very beginning of Deuteronomy 7 to make one more connection between the excerpts on the handout for this first class session.

Deuteronomy 7:1 states, “When the Lord your God shall bring you into the land which you are entering to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Ca-

naanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you.” We know what happens next, but it is worth pausing here, to see where the text situates us.

The text addresses “you” and “your God,” and thus we are situated as reading along with, if not as, the Israelites. And then it continues to name the seven nations who will be displaced and killed so that Israel can possess the land. It is worth naming them, as the Bible itself takes care to do: the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

When we read Deuteronomy 7:1 together in class, when one student reads it out loud, they often struggle with the names, as they do when we read various genealogies from Genesis later in the course. But reading these genealogies or lists of those doomed to destruction, pausing to struggle with the names, slows down our reading process; instead of encouraging readers to skim, or worse, skip, such biblical passages, we must pause to see the work that they do within the text, for the narrative, and for us to recognize, and memorialize, both that which is built up in and by genealogies and that is brought down in lists of utter destruction. Thus when we encounter and explore Genesis 10:15–17, as we will later in the course, we recognize the connections between Deuteronomy 7:1 and Gen. 10:15–17: “And Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn, and Heth, And the Jebusite, and the Amorite, and the Girgashite, And the Hivite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite.” Between Deuteronomy 7:1 and Genesis 10:15–17, we recognize the identity of these nations, who are to be “sacrificed”<sup>29</sup> so that Israel might live in their land; we learn that they are related to each other and that six out of the seven are Canaan and his descendants.<sup>30</sup> Who is Canaan? Canaan is the son of Ham and grandson of Noah, whom Noah curses, stating, “Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers” (Gen. 9:25). A slave of slaves. Thus we would have to ask, what does Deuteronomy 7 have to do with enslavement? The importance of this question lies in its being asked, not answered—at least on the first day of class. On the first day of class, we are doing well simply to recognize that Deuteronomy 7 builds on the backs of enslaved non-Israelites. And we are doing well to acknowledge that, at least according to these three excerpts, there is reason enough to explore the inner-biblical resonances and connections between genocide, enslavement, and sexual violence that appear within the Bible itself as part of our thinking about the links among these types of violence in our own day.

But the last question I simply wish to introduce—on this first day of class—is what happens when we read the Bible as/with enslaved Israelites, as/with non-Israelite captured women, and as/with conquered Canaanites<sup>31</sup>—as well as with and from the perspective(s), for there are always multiple perspectives within groups too—of Israelites?

If I had it to do over again, I would add a fourth text to the first day’s handout, in order to introduce and anticipate our later course readings and

class discussions that will expand the rubric of genocide to include the killing of non-human animals. The fourth text could even be incorporated simply by excerpting more of Deuteronomy 7, "And God will love you, and bless you, and multiply you; he will also bless the fruit of your womb, and the fruit of your land, your grain, and your wine, and your oil, the produce of your cows, and the flocks of your sheep, in the land which he swore to your fathers to give you. You shall be blessed above all people; there shall not be barrenness among your people, or among your beasts" (Deut. 7:13–14). We could thus begin to see how Israelite animals are blessed along with Israelite people, that according to the Bible, the continuation of every species is dependent on God.<sup>32</sup> In other words, we could begin to query the different types of relationship(s) between human animals and non-human animals, as well as the different types of relationships between animals—human and non-human—and God, that the Bible offers in order to help us think more deeply and perhaps differently about the "companion species" with whom we share the world today.<sup>33</sup> We would then be more equipped to read the Bible with, and as, the animals that therefore we most definitely are.<sup>34</sup>

I cannot stress enough that these three biblical texts encountered on the first day of class offer only a partial, utterly incomplete sampling of "what the Bible says" about rape, slavery, and genocide.<sup>35</sup> And how could any introductory session (or even semester long course) on these topics, treated separately or, all the more so, grouped together, be otherwise? Numerous books, not to mention countless articles, have been written on each of these topics—from broad surveys on war, rape, and slavery to monographs focused on one specific text or group of related texts.<sup>36</sup> And I should also stress that many of the connections between Deut. 15 and 21 and among Deut. 7, 15, and 21, which I made in this essay, were at best broached in the most cursory of ways and others were left implicit or even somewhat dormant, to be returned to as the course progressed.

What I wanted to do on the first day of class, through the use of these three biblical texts, was simply—and not so simply—to introduce students to the Bible as a "strange" book, and to begin to make the critical, academic study of biblical texts a "familiar" exercise. I also sought to set the stage for the topics covered in this course (rape, slavery, and genocide), to begin to expand our definitions of violence and our scope of what constitutes violence to include systemic or structural oppression, and to begin to think about possible connections, by way of reading ancient texts, between racial, gendered, and global violence we are currently witnessing, if not experiencing first hand.

None of this was undertaken as a "purely" academic endeavor, but in the hopes of engaging our students as active, responsible, and yet in many ways complicit, agents in the world. As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay,

various cultural currents—each in their own ways calling attention not only to specific types of violence pervading our culture but also to the violence of systemic oppression(s) upon which our culture relies—contributed to my thinking this specific course into being and into action. And, writing about this course offered me the opportunity to reflect upon the “action” of teaching, and how activism is expressed—and more importantly how knowledge is gained—through critical and pedagogical, personal and political, engagements with both the past and the present.

The process of writing about this specific course, “Rape, Slavery, and Genocide in Bible and Culture,” also lent me greater clarity about my not-so-objective “objectives” to this course and others that I teach. It has brought into sharper focus my belief in the central, foundational importance of teaching toward the deconstruction of hierarchical binaries, by which I mean challenging and exposing the ways such binaries reflect and (re)produce violence in and of themselves.

The Bible, on one reading, canonizes and even appears to authorize, hierarchical binaries: male and female, Israelite and non-Israelite, enslaved and free, etc.<sup>37</sup> And yet, the Bible itself also complicates, perhaps even wreaks havoc, on these very binaries, making the Bible a splendidly teachable, exquisitely “anti-binary” text. Thus says the prophet Ezekiel to Israel: “Your birth and your origin is in the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite” (Ezek. 16:3). The complexity of Ezekiel 16 cannot be addressed here, nor can its sexual violence and the gendered nature of it—for Israel is gendered female throughout this passage—be overlooked or condoned.<sup>38</sup> But for my purposes, it serves as but one, parting example, where the Bible subverts, overturns, or at bare minimum, complicates its own hierarchical binaries. Here Israel, by definition presumably *not* Canaan and *not* female, is imagined as both Canaanite and female—the daughter of the “slave of slaves” descendants, the Hittite and the Amorite. What does this text mean? Who decides? We, as critical, engaged, readers, as well as purveyors and producers of our culture(s), do.

## NOTES

1. For example, we read Avalos’s chapter on “Slavery in the New Testament” as well as the introductory, Near Eastern, and Hebrew Bible chapters in his book, *Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Ethics of Biblical Scholarship* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011). Other books we read at least significant portions of include: Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010); Haynes, *Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); *The Bible and Posthumanism*, edited by Jennifer Koosed (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014) and *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*, edited by Stephen D. Moore (New York: Fordham Uni-

versity Press, 2014). It should be noted that while the course focused on Hebrew Bible primary texts, many of the readings, by virtue of their interests in the role the Bible plays in the history of American enslavement and its after effects and sexual violence in contemporary U.S. culture, focus on Christian readings of these texts.

2. Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Biblical Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 8.

3. The Society of Biblical Literature, the American Academy of Religion, and the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion have a number of resources that discuss the methods and goals of teaching the Bible in college and university classroom settings. See *Teaching the Bible in the Liberal Arts Classroom*, edited by Jane S. Webster and Glenn S. Holland (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012) and *Teaching the Bible in the Liberal Arts Classroom Volume Two*, edited by Jane S. Webster and Glenn S. Holland (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015). Especially useful for me during the planning of the course were Janet Everhart, "Dildos and Dismemberment: Reading Difficult Biblical Texts in the Undergraduate Classroom," Amy Cottrill, "Reading Textual Violence as 'Real' Violence in the Liberal Arts Context," and Susanne Scholz "Occupy Academic Bible Teaching," all appearing in the first volume (2012).

4. Some classic articulations of the importance of situatedness and social location in feminist theory include, Dona Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99. And Sandra Harding "Feminist Standpoint Epistemology" in *Whose Science, Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

5. Cf. Deut. 24:7.

6. On the word *initah* and whether it connotes rape or not, see, for example, Gravett (2004) and bibliographical references there as well as Scholz (2010: 30–39) and further references there.

7. I understand that some students might expect legal texts, but I still think that the content as well as the form, the bold prescriptions about utter death and the disregard for female agency couched in language that is *almost* easy to overlook since it is presented as "law," is disarming—especially when one is invited, and expected, to pause long enough to be able to pose contemporary questions to the texts.

8. As will become clear below, I am choosing the language of explicit and implicit intentionally, so as not to claim any one text is more or less violent than another. One might be seen as more obviously violent, but this does not mean that it is necessarily more violent.

9. For a reading that frames Deuteronomy 21 as a text about genocide and the gendered aspects of genocide see Steinberg (2018). See also Niditch (1993), 83–86 and Deborah L. Ellens, *Women in the Sex Texts of Leviticus and Deuteronomy: A Comparative Conceptual Analysis* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

10. See Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 109–12.

11. Deut. 21:13 could be translated, "after that you may come to her and master her (u-ve'altah), and she shall be your wife."

12. See Robert Kawashima, "Could a Woman Say 'No' in Ancient Israel? On the Genealogy of Legal Status in Biblical Law and Literature" *AJS Review* 35, no. 1 (2011): 1–22; Robert Kawashima, "Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law*, edited by Brent Strawn, et al., 306–319. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

13. See Cheryl B. Anderson *Women, Ideology, and Violence: Critical Theory and the Construction of Gender in the Book of the Covenant and the Deuteronomical Law* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 9.

14. Deut. 15: 12–17 is one of the epigraphs to Ta'Nehisi Coates's "The Case for Reparations" article. See Ta'Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

15. In Exodus 21:5, a related text but with some key differences, the enslaved person is said to declare, "I love my master, and my wife and children; I do not wish to go free." Still, faced with the provision of his freedom without his wife and children, how much choice does the enslaved person have?

16. See Steinberg, "Social Death and Gendered Genocide," for an examination of just this question.

17. The extent to which women in biblical Israel could be seen as property is still debated. Kawashima writes, "Insofar as daughters constituted a type of property of the patriarchal household, marriage constituted, in effect, an exchange of goods between houses," "Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible," 311. He also writes, "A man's power over his wife and children arguably constituted a type of limited ownership. Indeed, Exodus 20:17 provides what is, in effect, a list of the patriarch's belongings—house, wife, slave, ox, etc.—though an Israelite male cannot be said to have 'owned' his wife in the way that he owned an article of clothing, a beast of burden, etc." "Could a Woman Say 'No' in the Hebrew Bible?," 2. Lemos argues against equating women, or at least wives with property (T. M. Lemos, "Were Israelite Women Chattel: Shedding New Light on an Old Question," in *Worship, Women and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch*, ed. John J. Collins, T. M. Lemos, and Saul Olyan, 227–42 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2015). I do not, however, think there is much debate that marriage was understood as a transaction between men, whether or not women were conceived of as property; her consent was not deemed important enough, or relevant enough, to legislate.

18. Lemos writes, "Whether or not wives and daughters were the property of their husbands and fathers is a debated question that cannot be addressed at any length here" (T. M. Lemos, "Physical Violence and the Boundaries of Personhood in the Hebrew Bible," in *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 2, no. 500–31 (2013): 523). See also Carolyn Pressler, *The View of Women Found in the Deuteronomistic Family Laws* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1993) and Harold C. Washington, "'Lest He Die in the Battle and Another Man Take Her': Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Laws of Deuteronomy 20–22," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, eds. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 185–213 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) in addition to Kawashima, "Could a Woman Say 'No' in Ancient Israel?" and "Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible."

19. It seems possible that the social death for the enslaved Israelite who is set free after six years in Deut. 15, is more temporary than that of the captured woman in Deut. 21. In captivity her ethnicity and familial relations have been stripped from her, and even once she is discarded, this state remains. See Steinberg, "Social Death as Gendered Genocide." For the enslaved Israelite who does not leave after six years, and for the perpetually enslaved non-Israelite in Lev. 25, however their social death would be permanent.

20. See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Claudia Card, "Genocide and Social Death" *Hypatia* 18, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 63–79 and *Confronting Evils: Terrorism, Torture, and Genocide* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jana Králková, "What Is Social Death?" *Contemporary Social Science* 10, no. 3 (2015): 235–48; and Steinberg (2018). Avery Gordon writes, "Social death refers to the process by which a person is socially negated or made a human non-person as the terms of their incorporation into a society: living, they nonetheless appear as if and are treated as if they were dead" (Avery Gordon, "Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity," *borderlands* 10, no. 2 (2011): 10).

21. See Králková, "What Is Social Death?" for the concept's earlier use, beginning in the 1960s, in the context of social processes surrounding death. Meredith Minister has pointed out that the use of the concept of "social death" would need to be further refined and analyzed for its potential applicability to certain French feminist writers, for example, Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig, for whom women are in many ways not a viable, living, category, rather a creation and projection of men's thinking and writing, in much of Western thought.

22. See Steinberg, "Social Death as Gendered Genocide," for a link between gender, contemporary genocide, biblical texts, and social death.

23. See also Card, "Genocide and Social Death," and Steinberg, "Social Death as Gendered Genocide."

24. Lemos asserts, "According to biblical texts, Israelites and Judeans entered into treaty relationships with foreigners and thus saw them as human beings who had the standing to be parties to such arrangements." ("Physical Violence and the Boundaries of Personhood in the



Hebrew Bible," 516.) It appears that Deuteronomy 7 denies this evidence of "personhood" for the seven nations it lists.

25. Card writes, "But in paradigmatic instance of genocide, such as the holocaust, there are always some survivors, even when there is clear evidence that the invention was to eliminate everyone in the group" ("Genocide and Social Death," 72). The biblical text might attest that there were indeed survivors to the prescribed genocide of these seven nations called for in Deut. 7 (cf. Deut. 20), since at least some of them, appear in biblical texts after the conquest of the land (e.g., Josh 16:10; Judges 1:27–33; II Samuel 24:7; I Kings 9:16; Obadiah 1:20). On the discontinuities among biblical references to Canaanites as well as the difficulties involved in fixing their identities, see Stone, "Queering the Canaanite."

26. Deuteronomy 20:13–15, for example, also prescribes the taking of children, both sons and daughters.

27. See Steinberg, "Social Death as Gendered Genocide." See also Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 83–88.

28. See Alice Bach, "Introduction," especially the section "A Subversive Companion for Reading Ancient Texts," pp. xxiii–xxvi.

29. For the "ban as sacrifice" see Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 28–55. It should be noted, however, that Niditch discusses Deuteronomy 7 in what she calls "the ban as God's justice."

30. The exception being the Perizzites, who are included here for other, less clear reasons.

31. Warrior "reads the Exodus stories with Canaanite eyes" (Robert Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today" *Christianity and Crisis* 49, no. 12 (1989): 262. See also Edward Said, "Michael Walzer's 'Exodus and Revolution': A Canaanite Reading" *Grand Street* 5, no. 2 (1986): 86–106.

32. To some extent, death and the inability to thrive is also, according to the Bible, part of God's domain. See, for example, Deut. 28; Hosea 9:11. See Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Free Press/Macmillan, 1992), 83–99. I note that Israel being "blessed above all people" would open up discussion about hierarchies between peoples and nations, even while the text extends God's blessings to Israel and Israel's animals. Further, that Israelite animals are blessed opens into discussions about why they are blessed—in order to benefit human Israel?

33. See Ken Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); Moore, *Divinanimality*; and Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

34. See Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

35. Though I have to add that I don't find much of the analysis inaccurate or inconsistent on the topics of enslavement and rape insofar as the Bible locates authority, on the human level, with male Israelites of adult, patriarchal status.

36. Books I included in the course readings that are examples of broader, survey, studies include Avalos, *Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Ethics of Biblical Scholarship*; Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*; Scholz, *Sacred Witness*. By survey I do not mean to indicate a lack of depth and nuance (with exception being Avalos). An example of a more focused, single text specific book that I included is Haynes, *Noah's Curse*.

37. Of course these binaries intersect, such that they are further refined, or might they also begin to break down by way of such multiplicity, through male non-Israelite enslaved, female Israelite slave, widowed (and thus "free") woman, etc.

38. See Tamar Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos: A Study on the Book of Ezekiel* (London and New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003) and bibliographical references there.

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