THE STRANGER WITHIN: NARRATIVE SPACE AND IDENTITY
CONSTRUCTION IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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ABSTRACT

The Stranger Within:
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Judges is a preeminently spatial book. The book of Judges describes the Israelites

entering the land of Canaan, and struggles with questions regarding how to live among a

strange people, foregrounding the question of communal identity. This project

investigates how the narrative's use of space contributes to Israel's identity construction

with particular emphasis on how the spatial depiction of Israel's presence in the land of

Canaan effects Israel's communal identity construction within the story world of Judges.

Three stories from the book of Judges are the focus of this study: Ehud (Judges

3:12-30), Samson (Judges 13-16), and the Levite and his woman and the descent into

civil war (Judges 19-21). Each story is presented as a vignette that portrays the

community in a different relationship to the space it occupies, resulting in different

leadership strategies, community organization, and relationships. Situated in a postexilic

Persian era context, the multivalent spaces of Judges suggest that a plural Israelite

community is justifiably anxious about becoming lost in a spatial void. This horrifying

possibility drives the book of Judges, forcing its writers to carve out a space (any space –

even a textual space) to understand the implications of their own existence.

Within the book of Judges, Israel's entry into foreign social space produces a

community defined by both external and internal identity boundaries that create/reflect

communal fragmentation, demand fluid spatial movements, and constitute changing

definitions of foreignness. Using critical space theory, (particularly the works of Edward

Casey, Tim Cresswell, and Sara Ahmed) this dissertation examines how the narrative of

Judges is both produced by a community and produces a community as it engages in a

narrative struggle to define Israelite identity.

Dedicated in memory of Rev. Stephen Calos and in honor of Rev. Laura Calos,

who always pushed me to follow my passions and dream big.

To Tristan, for relentless support and encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One:

Introduction

The book of Judges is framed as a spatial enterprise. Read in the context of the

larger Deuteronomistic History, Judges tells the story of the Israelites after their return

from the exodus in Egypt. They arrive in the land promised to them by God only to

discover that it is already occupied. The problem facing the Israelites is obvious: if they

are to remain in the land they must find a way to live peaceably among the peoples

already inhabiting it, or they must evict the inhabitants of the land. Each story features a

similar plot line: the Israelites are confronted with a foreign power and a leader must rise

up to meet the challenge. Again and again, the reader is reminded that the "promised

land" is not a spatial void. It is a thriving social landscape. Living in the "promised land"

will require staking a social claim to the space, and making compromises and social

negotiations.

Space and spatial considerations go hand-in-hand with the development of

communal identity and group cohesion. The stories we tell about our space come to shape

the way we think about our space and also the way we think about ourselves. The book of

Judges is also dealing with the consequences of apostasy, syncretism, and moral

degradation, and working out political or economic issues. However, my thesis is that

each of these concerns, can be read as either the direct result of anxiety about space, or

directly impacting the Israelite experience of space (be it geographic space, social space,

home space, or body space). My reading of three stories from Judges will foreground the

geographic spaces, social spaces, and bodily spaces of the narratives in an effort to demonstrate how the narrative use of space produces Israelite identity.

The presuppositions that support this dissertation are (1) that there is a dialogical relationship between social space and social bodies; and (2) that narrative space is at least analogous to the space of lived experience. Regarding the first, social theorist Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) argued that space is dialogical decades ago. Lefebvre builds his space theory on a Marxist foundation.[1] One of the unifying themes in his work is the application of the concept of dialectical materialism (central to the work of Marx and Engels) to other sectors of life.[2] According to Lefebvre, every society produces its own space. The space a society produces becomes a tool of thought and action and the context for everything else that happens in a society. Thus, a dialogical relationship is at work: a society shapes its social space, and social space becomes the context that shapes a society.

Regarding the second presupposition, if space is both shaped by a community *and* a shaper of community, then it follows that a close analysis of space can reveal quite a lot about a people: such as its values, motives, and morals. It has the potential to help explain why and how a community functions the way it does, and can aid us in predicting how a community might react to stress or cope with anxieties. The way we order our spaces is an expression of how we prioritize our lives. Assuming the spaces described in the text are at least analogous to the lived experience of space, then the community that shapes and is shaped by these textual spaces is at least analogous to the lived experience of community. That is not to say the text (re)constructs a historical community, but that the

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[1] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991).
[2] Rob Shields, *LeFebvre, Love, and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2.

text constructs spaces and peoples with qualities that are relatable. In other words, the text itself is a space – a space exterior to any historical, physical, or mental space that allows the manipulation of ideas, circumstances, things, people, and so on.

In the exegetical chapters that follow, I will use critical space theory as my primary theoretical tool for exploring the textual construction of space in the book of Judges. To date, critical space theory has not been applied to the book of Judges. Moreover, most biblical scholarship using critical space theory has been limited to Lefebvre. This project will both widen the use of critical space theory in biblical studies, to include the book of Judges, and broaden the palate of theorists used, moving away from the more Marxist, materially-driven analyses of space in the biblical text to see the text itself as space.

The following section introduces critical space theory very broadly with focus chiefly on human geography. I go on to introduce how biblical scholars have made use of critical space theory to read biblical texts.

Critical Space Theory and Biblical Studies

The social production of space was perhaps most clearly articulated by Marxist scholar and social theorist, Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre asserts a unitary theory of space, the aim of which is to construct a theoretical unity between the physical, mental, and social space.[3] Lefebvre argues that every society and every mode of production produces its

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[3] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 11. Lefebvre situates himself against Foucault and Chomsky. Foucault asserts that "knowledge [*savoir*] is also the space in which the subject may take up a position and speak of the objects with which he deals in his discourse" (Foucault 1969, 238). Lefebvre takes issue with the fact that Foucault never explains what space he is referring to or how his understanding of space bridges the gap between practical and theoretical spaces. He critiques Chomsky for ignoring altogether the gap between mental and social space. Lefebvre argues that "theoretical practice" has produced a

own space and that social space is (re)produced in both covert and overt ways.

According to Lefebvre, social space contains and assigns appropriate places to the social

relations of reproduction and production and contains representations of the interaction

between social relations of production and reproduction.[4] Through symbolic

representation, these social relations can cohesively coexist. Symbolic representation

simultaneously exhibits and conceals the interaction between social relations of

production and reproduction.[5]

    From the distinctions among social relations of reproduction, relations of

production, and symbolic representation emerges Lefebvre's spatial trialectic:[6] (1) spatial

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proliferation of "mental spaces," but has neglected the relationship between mental space and physical and social space, which is where he makes his intervention.

    [4] Lefebvre draws on Karl Marx, but also on Georg Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche (*The Production of Space*, 21-24). Stuart Elden summarizes it best in *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible*, writing that Lefebvre understood these three thinkers to provide three ways to understand the modern world:

> Hegel thinks in terms of the state, Marx society, and Nietzsche civilization. We can therefore view the modern world as Hegelian – a political theory of the nation-state, the state engulfing and subordinating civil society, that is social relations; as Marxist – the relation of the working class with the nation-state, industrial change and its consequences more important than ideas; and as Nietzschean – an assertion of life and the lived against political and economic processes; resistance through poetry, music and theatre; the home of the extraordinary, the surreal and the supernatural" (74).

Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004). For further discussion, see Christian Schmid, "Henri Lefebvre's Theory of the Production of Space: Towards a Three-Dimensional Dialectic," in *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, ed. Kanishka Goonewardena et al. (London: Routledge, 2008), 27–45.

    [5] Lefebvre writes:

> It [symbolic representation] displays them [social relations of production and reproduction] while displacing them – and thus concealing them in symbolic fashion – with the help of, and onto the backdrop of, nature. Representations of the relations of reproduction are sexual symbols, symbols of male and female, sometimes accompanied, sometimes not, by symbols of age – of youth and old age. This is a symbolism which conceals more than it reveals, the more so since the relations of reproduction are divided into frontal, public, overt – and hence coded – relations on the one hand, and, on the other, covert, clandestine and repressed relations which, precisely because they are repressed, characterize transgressions related not so much to sex *per se* as to sexual pleasure, its preconditions and consequences. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 32.

    [6] Edward Soja succinctly and cogently summarizes Lefebvre's trialectic in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places*, referring to spatial practice as "Firstspace" or "perceived space," representations of space as "Secondspace" or "conceived space," and representational spaces as "Thirdspace" or "lived space" (70-82) Soja is not an impartial interpreter of Lefebvre, however. As a student of Lefebvre, Soja is heavily invested in Lefebvre's scholarship and is particularly interested in

practice, which connotes the production and reproduction of specific places in ways appropriate to social formation and ensures that social space will continue to (re)produce in a cohesive way; (2) representations of space, which include abstracted theories and philosophies, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, and social engineers, and are often expressed using verbal and mental systems that shape how a society thinks about its space;[7] and (3) representational spaces, which are the symbolic, underside, covert, and repressed aspects of social life that prompt the alternative restructuring of discourses about space, what Lefebvre described as "space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols."[8]

The earliest engagement of critical space theory by biblical scholars made nearly exclusive use of Lefebvre. Two of the most prominent volumes using space theory to interpret the Bible, *Constructions of Space I* and *II*, rely heavily on Lefebvre's trialectic, often following a predictable pattern: the contributors introduce the trialectic and proceed to apply it to their reading of a text or understanding of a concept.[9] This pattern has a tendency to fall into a spatial form of deconstructive criticism, whereby the authors seek

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expanding Lefebvre's notion of "representational spaces," or what Soja calls "Thirdspace." This causes Soja to spend a disproportionate amount of time analyzing and critiquing Thirdspace, a move that he justifies as a political choice and necessity, since Thirdspace has received very little critical attention in the past. See: Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 70–82.

[7] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38.

[8] Ibid., 39.

[9] Jon L Berquist and Claudia V Camp, eds., *Constructions of Space I: Theory, Geography, and Narrative*, T & T Clark Library of Biblical Studies (New York: T&T Clark, 2007); Jon L Berquist and Claudia V Camp, eds., *Constructions of Space II: The Biblical City and Other Imagined Spaces* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008). These volumes, including essays in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, represent the work of a joint program unit from the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, the "Constructions of Ancient Space Seminar." The seminar was initiated by Hebrew Bible scholar, James Flanagan, and represents one of the first forays by biblical scholars into space theory.

to overturn and displace spatial hierarchies and binaries.[10] Even the essays that critique

Lefebvre's rigid tripartite categories fall into a similar discourse of analyzing and

deconstructing power hierarchies in social space.

As useful as Lefebvre is in analyzing space, there are limits to his theory with

regard to the analysis of ancient spaces. Roland Boer notes that Lefebvre's understanding

of the economic functions is limited to modern, western capitalism and is unsophisticated

when applied to economies of the ancient world.[11] Therefore, application of Lefebvre to

the ancient world must be supplemented and complemented with more recent historical

and archaeological studies. One must take care to avoid anachronisms with the use of

Lefebvre to understand the biblical text (i.e. the ancient world knows nothing of modern

capitalism).

Additionally, Matthew Sleeman observes that biblical scholars have been

relatively uncritical of space theorists (Lefebvre in particular) who are averse to religion,

and how this may affect the way space theories are used to read overtly religious spaces.

Moreover, there has been little engagement by critical space theorists with biblical

studies. Geographers have been hesitant to engage topics such as religion, God, and Bible

and therefore have ignored an important aspect of spatiality. Ultimately, Sleeman

believes that going forward those using critical space theory in biblical studies will have

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[10] Kathryn Lopez, "Standing Before the Throne of God: Critical Spatiality in Apocalyptic Scenes of Judgment," in *Constructions of Space II: The Biblical City and Other Imagined Spaces*, ed. Jon L. Berquist and Claudia V. Camp (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 139–155. For example, Kathryn Lopez argues that apocalyptic literature is about a power struggle to define reality and attempts to implement a worldview as lived space Using Soja's concept of "Thirding as othering" and Foucault's concept of "heterotopia," Lopez reasons that apocalyptic writings attempt to define and normalize a world view that resists that propagated by dominant political leaders (154). Her use of spatial theory shows that apocalyptic writing overturns the binary between dominant political leaders and the disempowered. The underlying methodology is deconstructionist.

[11] Roland Boer, "Henri Lefebvre: The Production of Space in 1 Samuel," in *Constructions of Space II: The Biblical City and Other Imagined Spaces*, ed. Jon L. Berquist and Claudia V. Camp (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

to engage other, wider biblical disciplines in order to avoid becoming narrow and self-referencing.[12]

Subsequent volumes in the *Constructions of Space* series widen the theorists used and the types of space addressed. *Constructions of Space IV* and *V* take on issues of identity, social formation, bodies, and memory.[13] In these volumes, scholars recognize the nearly exclusive reliance on Lefebvre and Soja to engage and analyze space in biblical literature and offer a wider palate of critical space theory to exegete the spaces of biblical texts in even more imaginative ways. These essays include theorists such as Gillian Rose, Martina Löw, Jeff Malpas, and Jonathan Z. Smith.[14] Consequently, they also take on a wider variety of spaces including bodily space, the role of memory in the creation and habitation of space, spaces produced by the social construction of gender, and even cosmological spaces.[15]

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[12] Matthew Sleeman, "Critical Spatial Theory 2.0," in *Constructions of Space V: Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Gert T. M. Prinsloo and Christl M. Maier (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 49–68.

[13] Mark K. George, ed., *Constructions of Space IV: Further Developments in Examining Ancient Israel's Social Space* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013); Gert T. M. Prinsloo and Christl M. Maier, eds., *Constructions of Space V: Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013).

[14] Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1993); Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001); Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Washington Press, 1987).

[15] Michaela Geiger, "Creating Space Through Imagination and Action: Space and the Body in Deuteronomy 6:4-9," in *Constructions of Space IV: Further Developments in Examining Ancient Israel's Social Space*, ed. Mark K. George (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 44–60; Ann Jeffers, "Wicked Witches of the West: Construction of Space and Gender in Jezreel," in *Constructions of Space IV: Further Developments in Examining Ancient Israel's Social Space*, ed. Mark K. George (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 76–91; Victor H. Matthews, "Remembered Space in Biblical Narrative," in *Constructions of Space IV: Further Developments in Examining Ancient Israel's Social Space*, ed. Mark K. George (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 61–75. For example, Michaela Geiger studies the production of space through everyday routines in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Geiger uses the work of Martina Löw to undergird her thesis that the book of Deuteronomy functions as a large-scale transformation of space. Löw's research analyzes the conditions of transforming spaces on an institutional level. Her basic principle is that spatial modification can happen against a majority of people if a large amount of resources is used. Transformation can also happen if a large number of people change their spatial practice over a longer period of time (as long as there are few resisting structures). Geiger regards Moses' monologue as a

The work of religion scholar Jonathan Z. Smith stands apart for its attention to overtly religious places. In *To Take Place*, Smith theorizes that ritual is tightly bound to place.[16] He demonstrates that, in different ways, the *Mishnah* and Christian liturgical calendar are both ways of reproducing the Temple and key Christian sites (respectively). Most relevant to Hebrew Bible, Smith argues that Ezekiel's vision of the new temple constitute a series of verbal mappings.[17]

Smith's work is influential for biblical scholar Mark George, who fits Smith's analysis of Ezekiel into Lefebvre's trialectic, arguing that Smith's analysis reveals the way in which Ezekiel's conceptual space (vision) of the temple organizes spatial practice.[18] In *Israel's Tabernacle as Social Space*, George goes on to demonstrate that the tabernacle is a space that expresses Israel's social identity, an outward expression of Israel in the world. Therefore, the tabernacle narratives do not simply describe the creation of a divine dwelling and worship space, rather they express a social configuration and Priestly understanding of Israelite society, social organization, and Israel's role in the divine creation. George's analysis of the tabernacle's social space

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persuasive speech that attempts to convince the audience that spatial modification offers material and spiritual benefits. She reads Deut 6:4-9 as a statement by Moses about how Israelites will realize their identity through their bodies, inhabited buildings, and daily routines, all of which create space. Ann Jeffers analyzes how cosmology impacts ancient Israelite spatial systems, especially the way in which women are written out of Israel's social space, which has "serious consequences for the social and religious situation of women, in particular by controlling access to knowledge" (91). Victor Matthews analyzes the way in which memories of a space can be manipulated to serve other purposes at later times. This suggests that the spatial symbols of a society's memory can be changed and molded in order to (re)shape a space to fit new purposes. In this way, memory is a narrative tool used to bring up past events that will provide the basis for current ideas and practices.

[16] Of ritual, Smith writes,

> Ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention. It is a process for marking interest. It is the recognition of this fundamental characteristic of ritual that most sharply distinguishes our understanding from that of the reformers, with their all too easy equation of ritual with blind and thoughtless habit. It is characteristic, as well, that explains the role of place as a fundamental component of ritual: place directs attention.
> Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, 103.

[17] Ibid., 47–73.

[18] Mark K. George, *Israel's Tabernacle As Social Space* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Lit, 2009), 104.

clarifies the way in which Priestly cosmology thoroughly permeates the tabernacle and the Priestly view of Israelite society.[19]

Christl M. Maier's monograph, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* studies the female personification of the city of Zion, which she argues creates a new image of Zion by intertwining spatial and gendered perspectives.[20] Smith's work is also influential for Maier. She uses his definition of sacredness as culturally specific, open to change, and the result of the cultural work of ritual in her analysis of Israel's construction of Jerusalem.[21] Maier has particular interest in understanding how the biblical authors address political issues of their day with concepts of sacred space. Her book analyzes female metaphors for Zion chronologically, beginning with pre-exilic Zion (i.e. Psalms 46, 48, Isaiah 6, Micah 3) and concluding with post-exilic Zion (i.e. Isaiah 40-66). She concludes that the female personification of the city creates a relationship between God, the population of Jerusalem, and sacred space.

Both George's and Maier's monographs assume that the literature of the Bible bears some likeness to human experience. These monographs demonstrate that the narrative construction of space can be an important avenue of analysis for the understanding of how theologies and cosmologies function. This type of analysis lays an important foundation for moving forward because it demonstrates that spatiality plays an important role in the effect texts have. Spatial analysis produces layers of meaning that

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[19] Ibid., 192.

[20] Christl M. Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

[21] Ibid., 14–16.

go beyond simply interpreting the text to interpreting the world produced as a result of the text.

Spatial Discourses on Judges

Due to the nature of its narrative content, the book of Judges has always invited critical attention to space. For example, maximalist historical-critical scholarship tends to produce reconstructions of ancient Israel that rely heavily on biblical textual details to study the cartographic spaces reported by the text in order to reconstruct early Israel's entry into the land during an actual, historical period of the judges.[22] These scholars have typically assumed that Judges describes major events from the history of Israel and have attempted to match the events of Judges to the historical origins of Israel in the land.[23]

The 1970s marked a shift in biblical studies away from these types of historical critical examinations of the text and toward more poetic analyses. This shift is analogous to the move in spatial discussions away from positivism and toward space as a critical category (see the following chapter). In both disciplines, conversation changed from empirically "provable" scholarship based on physics (in the case of space), or archaeology (in the case of historically-driven biblical studies) and began to consider the way spaces and texts could function socially, politically, economically, and culturally.

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[22] John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (New York: Harper, 1960). Bright argues that the texts of Joshua and Judges reflect a roughly 12th century B.C.E. context. Noth represents a less maximalist position, though like Bright, Noth assumes that the biblical text reflects an actual historical period of the judges.

[23] Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, trans. E.W. Nicholson (Sheffield, Eng: University of Sheffield, 1981). For example, Martin Noth understood the Deuteronomist (Dtr), an individual, as an "honest broker," who wished to "present it [the history of the Israelite people] objectively and base it upon the material to which he had access" (84). Noth's assumption was that the Dtr functioned as a historian similar to Hellenistic and Roman historians, assembling material from older traditions and editing it into a unified whole. Noth writes, "Dtr was not merely an editor but the author of a history which brought together material from highly varied traditions and arranged it according to a carefully conceived plan" (10).

Since the 1970s scholars have been reluctant to rely on Judges as a source for

Israelite history. Roland de Vaux called the "age of the judges" an artificial construct,[24]

and J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes cautioned against taking the stories in Judges at

face value, or assuming too much about "the period of the Judges" based on the biblical

text.[25] For many scholars, the text is an ideologically-driven myth of origin that is a

product of literary imagination more than a reflection of a historical period of the judges.

This point of view has opened the door for a wide array of other readings (political,

structuralist, ideological, feminist readings, etc.). These readings often take the

geographic, built, and body spaces of the book seriously, critically analyzing their

functions.

For example, literary critic Marc Zvi Brettler understands the main purpose of the

book of Judges in political terms, and carefully considers how geographic delineations

relate to political identity. Brettler argues that there is a significant pro-Judean (southern)

theme that runs throughout the book of Judges and functions to tie the book together.[26]

The theme is introduced when the tribe of Judah is admonished to go up against the

Canaanites and conquer the land (Judg 1:1-3). The conclusion draws the theme together

with the triumph of Judah once again, this time over Benjamin, which functions as an

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[24] Roland de Vaux and David Smith, *The Early History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 751.

[25] James Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1986). Robert B. Coote and Keith W. Whitelam, *The Emergence of Early Israel in Historical Perspective* (Sheffield, Eng: Sheffield Phoenix Press Limited, 2010). For many scholars, the text offers a glimpse into the past, but rather than illuminating a premonarchical era, it reflects communal interests of a later Josianic, Persian, or even the Hellenistic period. For example, Keith Whitelam argues that the biblical text is not a historical document, and therefore focuses his study of early Israelite identity on archaeological evidence, of which he says there is too little to clearly differentiate Israelite material culture from indigenous material culture. In his work with Robert Coote, Whitelam built an argument about Israelite origins based on archaeological data and ethnographic models, asserting that the portrayals of Israel's past in the biblical text are influenced by its later present.

[26] Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges* (London: Routledge, 2001), 116.

implicit critique of Saulide leadership.[27] The mention of Judah at the beginning and end

of the book form an *inclusio* for the pro-Judean framework. The judge stories in the main

part of the text typically portray the northern most judges as negative leadership models

while the southernmost judges are given more positive portrayals.[28] Brettler sees the book

as a clear support for monarchy, specifically a pro-Judah, Davidic kingship.[29]

David Jobling's structuralist treatment of Judg 3:27-29, 7:24-8:3, and 12:1-6

(stories of skirmishes at the fords of the Jordan) also demonstrates how the ideology of

the book relates identity to spatial division. He concludes that an opposition between

"inside" and "outside" emerges from these three stories: Ephraimites, who live inside

Canaan (west of the Jordan), see themselves as Israelite "insiders," while identifying non-

Israelites as "outsiders." However, the Gileadites belong to Israel, but reside

geographically outside of Canaan. By positing Israelites living outside of Canaan, the

stories imply the possibility of non-Israelites living inside Canaan, which focuses

attention on the problem of the Canaanites.[30] The division of space (especially along the

Jordan River) is one way of determining ethnic identity, according to Jobling's analysis.

Geographic spaces are not the only ones to be scrutinized in the book of Judges.

Gale Yee uses ideological criticism to study the treatment of bodies in Judges 17-21,

particularly the threat of male-on-male rape of the Levite (which reveals unequal guest-

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[27] Ibid., 111.

[28] Ibid., 112.

[29] See also: Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), xv. Schneider observes a similar contrast, particularly in the last three chapters of Judges. The Benjaminite town of Gibeah is shown to be a sexually depraved, inhospitable place. The depravity of the people in the town seems to justify Israel's decision to nearly annihilate it, which is narrowly derailed when Israel spares all but 600 Benjaminite men. "The implication of the final story," writes Schneider, "is that all succeeding generations of Benjamin, including the future King Saul, are descendants of a male warrior and a raped woman from Jabesh-Gilead or Shiloh. Northern Benjamin is contrasted with Judah, the tribe of the future King David and therefore authoritative enough to rule all of Israel" (xv).

[30] David Jobling, "Structuralist Criticism: The Text's World of Meaning," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 110.

host power relations), the treatment of the concubine (especially the way the concubine's

body becomes an extension of the Levite's body in the event of the rape), and the cultic

chaos of the Levite's "antisacrifice" in the butchering of the concubine's body.[31] Yee sees

the ideological thrust of these chapters as an indictment on Israel's tribal period and a

rhetorical endorsement of Josiah's religious reform. These values are lodged in the bodies

of the characters in Judges 17-21. Yee's work with this text lays the groundwork for

understanding bodies not only as shapers of space (in physical and social dimensions),

but as spaces unto themselves, onto which cultural mores and expectations are written

and performed.

The unusual number of women featured in the book (several are even given

names) makes it ripe for analysis of the roles of women, their bodies, and the spaces

women come to occupy. One of the earliest feminist interpreters of Judges, Phyllis Trible,

reads the story of the Levite's woman, a woman in a man's world. Not only is the woman

consistently out-of-place in the spaces that she physically inhabits, moving in, out, and

through male social spaces, but her body space bears the burden of these transgressions.

Trible's retelling of the story (re)sensitizes the reader to the violence evoked by spatial

dissonance of this woman who experiences horrific violence in order to keep the machine

of patriarchal ideology well-oiled.[32]

Mieke Bal's woman-centered analysis of Judges foregrounds the house as a key

conflictual space of the book. Bal argues that the book is driven by the conflict between

the household politics of virilocal vs. patrilocal marriage (not necessarily national

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[31] Gale A. Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 138–160.

[32] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), 65–118.

politics).[33] The argument becomes spatial when Bal explores the differences between

virilocal and patrilocal marriage and how this impacts the understanding of "house," both

as a physical structure and as a family unit.[34] Bal suggests that the book of Judges

deconstructs the double meaning of "house" as both space and family by breaking down

the opposition between patrilocy and virilocy, which results in chaos and violence. In the

patrilocal system the position of power of the son-in-law with respect to his father-in-law

is less clear than the virilocal system, in which a structure of paternal domination is

possible over several generations.[35] Neither system can account for the complexity of

"the house" in both its connotations as space and family. The opposition between the two

breaks down, and the consequence, Bal asserts, is the house becomes a space where the

political and the domestic meet, making it an unstable (violent) space.[36]

Karla Bohmbach explores the gendered aspects of public and private space in

Judges 19-21. In the ancient world, women's space was in the private, domestic realm,

while men were free to move in and through the public sphere. When the woman of

Judges 19 is bold enough to leave the private home of the Levite and set out on her own

for her father's home, she violates this demarcation of space. Thereafter she is given very

little agency over the things that happen to her. She is silent when she travels back to the

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[33] Mieke Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). In the patrilocal system the couple lives with or near the bride's father. Under the virilocal system the married couple lives in the husband's home.
[34] Bal writes,

> The figuration of intimate connections in the *house*, a socially sanctioned symbol of the domestic and yet a dominating figure for *and* issue in the conquest at large, allowed us to see how the conflicts that underlie the book also generated a type of narrative composition that leads to a discourse we may term *spatial* narrative, a type of discourse that requires different reading habits. With all its jumping from one story to the other, my reading was meant to show how such a 'spatial' reading can illuminate new aspects of the book, while leading, in the end, to a view at least as comprehensive as that which others have presented before me. *Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 232.

[35] Ibid., 175.
[36] Ibid., 178.

Levite's home with the Levite and his male servant. She is little more than a warm body of living flesh in this moment. When she is thrown out of the home of the Ephraimite host to be gang raped by a mob of men, her body bears the consequence for her transgression into male space.[37] Bohmbach's work demonstrates how threatening female bodies can be to a patriarchial and virilocal body politic.

In each of these feminist interpretations, female bodies are read as important spaces in which patriarchal ideology is projected, performed, and in some cases, challenged.[38] More than just the way female bodies function as spaces, feminist and ideological criticism opens the door for considering how the text is also a space in which narrative elements are arranged, and political and ideological concerns are expressed in order to affect certain responses and discourage others.[39] Just as physical manifestations

[37] Karla G. Bohmbach, "Conventions/Contraventions : The Meanings of Public and Private for the Judges 19 Concubine," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* no. 83 (June 1, 1999): 89.

[38] J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 61–93, 170–201. Like Trible and Bal, J. Cheryl Exum reads the women in Judges against the dominant male voice in the text. Women in the biblical text are often secondary characters, serving a larger male agenda. In her book, *Fragmented Women*, Exum reads two stories from Judges (Samson and the Levite and his woman) and attempts to put together the fragments of female stories in order to reveal the inner workings of male agendas. In her reading of the Samson story, she sees the androcentric agenda as teaching Israelite men about the dangers of foreign women, which is reinforced by the nationalist ideology that Philistines are "bad" (and by extension, no good can come of Philistine women). The only "good" woman in the text is an Israelite woman, and her role is limited to that of motherhood. Throughout the narrative, women are presented as sexual objects that must be tightly controlled, and cannot be trusted. The message to women depends on women accepting the assumed distinctions between "good" and "bad" women and encourages women to follow the example of Samson's mother: to be lawful, loyal, and nurturing mothers. In her reading of the Levite's woman, Exum juxtaposes the story with that of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), demonstrating how both women are narratively raped. Both women show a measure of sexual independence early in their stories, for which they are punished. An androcentric agenda is propagated once again as women are shown to be in need of male control over their bodies (200). In both stories, when women move into male social or physical space, they are quickly punished either physically or narratively. Both Trible and Exum foreground the text's adherence to an androcentric agenda that literally and figuratively keeps women in their place.

[39] See also: Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 117–140. Fewell and Gunn investigate the themes of gender and power as they run through the primary story of Genesis-Kings. They consider the implications of patriarchy for the social order expressed in Genesis-Kings, and read this primary story from the margins as a story of women (and children). For Fewell and Gunn, Judges fits into a larger Genesis-Kings narrative, and read from the margins, it has particular implications for families. They observe that, as the nation fractures, the focus often turns toward families (121). However, in Judges the interest no longer

of space have a dialogical effect in which they are both shaped by and shapers of culture, so too are literary texts. Texts are written, controlled, and designed by people, but they also have the power to shape a people, too.

The preceding selective overview demonstrates that a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches have broached issues of spatiality and bodies in the Judges text. However, the text's constructions of spatiality have hardly been exhausted. Yet to be analyzed are the effects of the production and consumption of space in the text. The present study investigates how the narrative construction of space impacts the construction of Israelite identity; specifically how the literary construction of spaces in Judges – the way space is literarily imagined, described, and used – can help us understand the function of the book. I build on the work already begun by these biblical scholars to demonstrate that Judges is an eminently spatial book that sets out to demark and define space because doing so shapes identity, ideology, politics, economics, ethnicity, and culture. This is a book of high-stakes spaces.

I will employ three underutilized critical space theories as analytical tools to engage these questions. Specifically, I will be using the work of Edward Casey, Tim Cresswell, and Sara Ahmed[40] to read three texts from the book of Judges: the stories of Ehud (Judg 3:12-30), Samson (Judges 13-16), and the Levite and his woman and the

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seems to be on lineage, male descendants, or genealogy. Instead, the roles of women (especially mothers) take on new and varied dimensions. Achsah negotiates for better land, Deborah takes on a military role, and Jael single-handedly takes on the enemy. Samson's mother is set apart from her husband by an angel of God, and is consistently given more information and knowledge than her husband is. The final women of the book, the Levite's concubine and the women abducted at Shiloh, have no voice and no choice about their futures. Women are reduced to objects caught between their father's house and their husband's house without the assurance of safety in either location. This world of silenced women and justified violence gives way to Hannah's story in 1 Samuel 1 (136).

[40] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993); Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000).

descent into civil war (Judges 19-21). I have chosen texts that reflect themes of fragmentation, fluidity, and foreignness of identity in Judges. My focus on fragmentation, fluidity, and foreignness, as they are given narrative spatial expression, is intended as a means of enhancing our narratological understandings of these texts.

Each of the three primary theorists I have chosen reflects a different approach to critical space theory. Casey offers a phenomenological angle on space theory, as he asks what role place plays in the orientation of human bodies. Cresswell approaches space theory sociologically, giving special attention to the expectations about human behavior in place. Finally, Ahmed brings a post-colonial focus, with which she analyzes the relationship between strangers, embodiment, and community. Each theorist brings a perspective uniquely able to analyze the themes of fragmentation, fluidity, and foreignness. The result is a series of spatial soundings in which each text is refracted through the lens of spatial theory allowing us to experience the multitude of storied spaces in the stories, and the ways they contribute to the construction of Israelite identity.

The works of these theorists will be given more ample attention in the following chapter. While this dissertation aims to analyze spaces within the text, we would be remiss to exclude the ways in which the text itself is a space. Therefore, we must consider the social complexities endemic to writing and reading texts. I turn to the foundational thought of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to aid our understanding of textual production. In the section that follows, I consider the political and social aspects of producing and consuming texts.

Socially Produced and Consumed Texts

Since reading and writing are skills afforded only to the most privileged of any society, the very existence of any piece of literature is wrought with social and political issues. This is all the more true in an ancient imperial context where reading and writing were highly valued skills, possessed by only the most learned persons. Literacy could be harnessed to advance a political, social, economic, or religious agenda. Brief consideration for the social production and consumption of texts in the post-exilic world will give us greater appreciation for the complexity of the narrative space enclosed by the book of Judges.

Bourdieu helps parse some of these difficulties and complexities. His main interest was in the sociology of symbolic power relations, particularly those between culture, social structure and action. Throughout his career, Bourdieu was seeking to answer the question: How and why do social systems of hierarchy and domination continue to persist and reproduce from generation to generation with little or no resistance?[41] Why would large groups of people act against their own best interests? He finds answers to these questions by considering the ways in which cultural resources, processes, and institutions reproduce power and domination through competition. All forms of cultural symbols and practices are imbued with interests to boost social distinction. The struggle for increased social distinction is at the center of social life because power is fundamental to social existence and increased social distinction correlates with increased social power.[42]

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[41] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[42] David Swartz, *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 6.

Bourdieu imagines society as a collection of interrelated fields, which is a spatial and relational term for competitive arenas of social relations and interactions. Bourdieu defines a field as "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions."[43] Fields are structured spheres of production, dissemination and acquisition of capital (goods, knowledge, services, status etc.).[44] They are those arenas in which human beings interact in order to satisfy human needs or produce those things needed to satisfy human needs. That is, fields always produce a particular capital native to that field, be it symbolic or material capital. Thus, fields are arenas of struggle where rank and hierarchy (positions within the field) struggle to define and produce legitimate capital for that field and to accumulate valued forms of capital.[45]

Fields operate with a certain economic logic characterized by the struggle over the production, reproduction, possession and control over capital specific to that field.[46] For example, in the political field, persuasive rhetoric is a form of capital that is produced, reproduced, and sought after. Those that can write persuasive speeches or create convincing advertisements possess a valuable skill in the political field. Capital is not

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[43] Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 97.

[44] Swartz, *Culture & Power*, 117.

[45] David Swartz, "Pierre Bourdieu on Power," *Conference Papers -- American Sociological Association* (Annual Meeting 2008 2008): 4.

[46] Bourdieu draws on Max Weber's notion of "religious interest," which represents accumulated symbolic labor and is connected to the constitution of a religious field where a group of religious specialists is able to monopolize the administration of religious goods and services. Bourdieu derives part of his concept of field as a competitive social space from Weber's identification of the opposing interests of religious leadership (i.e. priest, prophet, sorcerer), which puts them in opposition and competition with each other. Weber's work helps Bourdieu to develop his understanding of the field as "relatively autonomous," by which he means that fields operate independently, but overlap with each other. Weber claimed that Calvinism played an important role in the development of capitalism, but Weber does not suppose that Calvinism and capitalism need each other in order to exist, only that Calvinism produced conditions that fostered capitalism. From this, Bourdieu surmises that social systems that ultimately function toward different ends are nonetheless interrelated, leading him to the conclusion that any particular social system is only relatively autonomous. See: Terry Rey, *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy* (Oakville, CT: Equinox Pub., 2007), 42; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Peter Baehr and Gordan C. Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002).

only (or just) an economic term, but one that refers to resources that are valued, over which there is a struggle because they function as a social relation of power.[47] Breaking from a strict economic model, Bourdieu does not conceptualize capital as merely material, but also symbolic. Capital is simply a valued resource that becomes the object of struggle within a field.[48] For example, a grasp of cogent, compelling rhetorical strategies is a form of capital in the political field that is not material, but certainly could be translated into material capital (a person with these skills could seek employment as a political speech writer, exchanging the skill for money).

The literary field is part of the linguistic field, which includes spoken and written language. The linguistic field depends on the literary field, a "subfield of restricted production." This means that the cultural goods produced by the literary field (what Bourdieu calls "instruments of production:" rhetorical devices, elements of style, etc.) are primarily intended for use by use by other producers (writers, journalists, scholars, etc.) who will make them available to non-producers for consumption (readers).[49] The literary field is a "subfield of restricted production" because only an elite few (writers and editors of style guides, for example) have the power to produce the instruments of production needed to manufacture literature worthy of publication.[50] The creation of the literary instruments of production (grammars, dictionaries, style guides, etc.) is a skill that gives those who have it power over language, because the instruments of production are those linguistic elements that are recognized and cited as examples of "good usage."[51]

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[47] Swartz, *Culture & Power*, 43.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 115.
[50] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 57.
[51] Ibid., 58.

Capital in the literary field revolves around access to the instruments of expression (resources needed to produce written discourse, such as books, grammars, dictionaries, etc.), which are possessed by, and available to, only those who have access to education. Education consecrates the dominant use of language as the only legitimate use of language, codifying and unifying language.[52] In order to understand the conventions of "good usage" of language, and decide what counts as "good usage" education is required.[53] In this sense, those with a large amount of capital in the literary field (those with access to education and the instruments of production) dominate over those that do not have access to these things. The literary field depends on the dispossession of the dominated classes. Bourdieu writes that,

> this dispossession is inseparable from the existence of a body of professionals, objectively invested with the monopoly of the legitimate use of the legitimate language, who produce for their own use a special language predisposed to fulfill, *as a by-product*, a social function of distinction in the relations between classes and in the struggles they wage on the terrain of language.[54]

In order to be a field of restricted production, the literary field (almost by definition) must break with non-producers.[55] This is a fact of the division of labor in the literary field.

Bourdieu's categories and concepts for thinking about the literary field are fertile ground for considering the production of the final form of the Judges text in a post-exilic environment. Only a small minority would have been literate enough to compose narratives like those in biblical literature. Relatively few would have access to the instruments of literary production in the ancient world (literacy, understanding of

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[52] Ibid., 49.
[53] Ibid., 61.
[54] Ibid., 59.
[55] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 115.

rhetorical devices, genres and literary tools, and access to education).[56] Those that did

have access to the instruments of literary production, therefore, had a good deal of control

over language, but also over the users of language. As Philip Davies writes, "Scribes,

then, were in possession of a resource–writing–unavailable to others and often regarded

as magical, divine in origin, occult."[57] In fact, Davies goes so far as to suggest that the

urban scribal elite developed its own culture in the ancient world, distinct from that of

rural peasants and from the ruling class, which it served. "Its stories, its values and its

skills will have differed from those of village," Davies writes, "but also in some respects

from temple and court as well, because its economic interests and intellectual horizons

were different."[58] What Davies describes is exactly the break between producers and non-

producers that Bourdieu suggests is inherent to the literary field.

The literary field dominates over users of language in many respects, but it also

functions as a dominated field. In the field of power (the field of fields, where various

fields struggle for control over the social order), the literary field occupies a dominated

position.[59] The literary field functions on an inverted economic scheme: those who enter

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[56] Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 153.I want to be clear that I am not making a sweeping generalization that *only* the scribal elite would have been literate. Susan Niditch makes a compelling argument that there was likely a continuum between primarily oral and primarily written societies. In other words, oral culture continued, even as a society began to depend more on written culture (4). Further, Niditch makes the point that literacy may have been more widespread in the ancient world than scholars have been willing to accept. She points to Carol Meyers' concept of "pragmatic" literacy, which meant learning to read only what was socially necessary, e.g., lists, names, numbers (40). My point is that the scribal elite would have literacy (likely on a higher level than simply "pragmatic literacy") *and* access to the instruments of production.

[57] Philip Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 18.

[58] Ibid.

[59] In *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Bourdieu defines the field of power as,

> the space of relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different fields (notably economic or cultural). It is the site of struggles between holders of

the literary field have an interest in disinterestedness: in honestly believing (and being perceived) that they are motivated only by selfless, noble gains, not economic profits or other perks. That is, it works to their benefit to feel and appear to be unfettered by external (economic) constraints. Bourdieu relates the literary field to prophecy in this respect: its authenticity (credibility, authority, specific *capital*) is owed to the fact that it receives no reward, and is not obviously motivated by remuneration.[60] It is also in the interest of those served by the literary field (political and religious leaders, in the case of ancient Israel) to honestly believe and to be perceived as not benefiting or profiting from the work of those in the literary field (scribes); otherwise the credibility of the cultural product will fall into question.

However, the literary field is not outside the need for profit, whether political or economic. In this sense, the literary field, like other arts, finds itself caught between a need to please those with economic and political investments in the literary field (what Bourdieu calls "bourgeoisie art"), and "art for art's sake," which allows the literary field a degree of autonomy to determine for itself what is "good literature."[61] The amount of

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different powers (or kinds of capital) which, like the symbolic struggles between artists and the 'bourgeois' in the nineteenth century, have a stake in the transformation or conservation of the relative value of different kinds of capital which itself determines, at any moment, the forces liable to be engaged in these struggles. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, ed. Werner Hamacher and David Wellbery E., trans. Samuel Emanuel (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1996), 215.

Thus, the field of power is, for Bourdieu, the "field of fields," in which fields compete for social control. For example, the literary field has influence over the users of language and therefore has a degree of power. But, in the field of power the literary field emerges as a dominated field because it has only limited influence over other fields, such as the economic field, according to whose "rules" the literary field must "play" if it is to sell books, newspapers, magazines, etc. and continue to have a degree of influence over the use of language.

[60] Ibid., 216.
[61] Ibid.

autonomy the literary field can have from external pressures depends on how effectively it can be translated or "refracted" to have an impact on its external influences.[62]

For as much power as the scribal elite had in the ancient world, they were also a fraction of the dominated class. Those with an ability to write were typically employed by rulers, though they themselves were not rulers. Priests and kings were not necessarily able to write; therefore the palace or the temple employed scribes.[63] That many written texts were products of the scribe's hand does not mean that they were solely the products of scribe's minds.[64] Even if a scribe were employed by the temple or palace to produce a certain work, he/she would certainly be aware that Persian authorities would also be conscious of what was produced.[65] Certainly, the ability to read and write gave a person a certain amount of power and indispensability in the ancient world, but in order to maximize the power of this skill, one must submit to the authority of a member or fraction of the ruling class who can employ them. Thus, the literary field exists both as a dominant and as a dominated field, relatively *autonomous* in relation to the elite, but simultaneously *dependent* on that same elite.

This helps us understand how the Deuteronomistic History (DH), and Judges in particular, survives beyond the Persian Empire. Scribes occupying a space of both

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[62] Ibid., 220.

[63] Davies, *Scribes and Schools*, 17.

[64] Ibid., 19.

[65] John Van Seters, "The Role of the Scribe in the Making of the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 8, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 110; Davies, *Scribes and Schools*, 17; Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).I do not want to give the impression that all scribes were temple scribes or that every scribe in the Yehud community was involved in the production of literature like that found in the Bible. As Davies and van Seters demonstrate, quite the opposite was the case. The greatest literary output would have been that of the palace, where most scribes produced relatively mundane documents (archives, book keeping records, etc.). Even those employed by the temple would have most likely been responsible for producing documents of the "everyday" variety. This observation only serves to strengthen my argument that those responsible for compiling and composing the stories of the Bible were among a very small minority in the Yehud community who could read and write and also had access to the "stream of tradition" (a la van der Toorn) necessary to assemble such a work.

dominator and dominant are put in a position to write texts that please the Persian empire, but can also be interpreted positively for the Yehudite community, of which they are members.[66] Read from the position of the colonized, the text is a fantasy. It represents an escape from their imperial existence, where they can imagine a life without empire. "In their reading," historian Jon Berquist writes, "they repress the daily experience of empire, and yet at the same time, they are reproducing empire, both in the sense that they are consuming an imperial text and in that they return to their lives as imperial bureaucrats."[67]

The text is a social space. More than simply words on a page, members of a certain social class have constructed the literary space in a certain way. Just as there are innumerable ways to construct a built space that reflect the needs, desires, and social, political, and economic class of those involved, so too are there innumerable ways to construct the space of a text, which also reflect the needs, desires, and class of its producers. As a result, the text attempts to create a space where certain readings are encouraged and others are dissuaded. As readers, we enter into the literary world of the text as guests entering a space built and produced ahead of us.

Although this project is not concerned with how the text constructs a historical community of the judges, considering the likely context of any literature is key to understanding its purpose. In the paragraphs below, I discuss the issues of locating and dating the book of Judges in its historical context.

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[66] Jon L Berquist, "Identities and Empire: Historiographic Questions for the Deuteronomistic History in the Persian Period," in *Historiography and Identity (Re)formulation in Second Temple Historiographical Literature*, ed. Louis Jonker (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 9.
[67] Ibid., 10.

Historical Context

Dating the book of Judges is a challenging proposition. There are no form-critical

markers to suggest that anything in the book is historically reliable or "true."[68] Dating the

text, or even simply determining the distance of the text from the events described, is

nearly impossible. With a dearth of information about authorship, or the author's interests

or goals, and little external evidence to confirm or disprove the veracity of the events

described, there is minimal evidence to arrive at a firm dating for the book aside from the

subjective internal analysis of the book itself.[69]

It has become increasingly popular in recent decades to see the biblical text of

Judges as a product of a later community and not a reliable history of any "period of the

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[68] Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 2.

[69] Scholars have long since been preoccupied with dating the book. In 1943 Martin Noth published his groundbreaking understanding of the Deuteronomistic History (DH), titled *The Deuteronomistic History*. His thesis was that the books of Joshua through Kings are a single work created during exile, around 550 B.C.E (79). He argued that the Deuteronomist (Dtr) used earlier sources to add a Deuteronomistic introduction and conclusion to an older form of the book of Deuteronomy, making it the introduction to the history presented in Joshua through Kings. Noth identified the message of intensifying decline and irreversible doom as the major theme in the DH, telling a story of apostasy and idolatry in Israel, resulting in God's punishment of Israel and leading ultimately to destruction. See: Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*; Noth, *The History of Israel*.

In 1973, Frank M. Cross argued that the DH underwent two redactions, a pre-exilic and exilic redaction. (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* [Boston: Harvard University Press, 1997]). Cross asserted that the first edition of the DH operated as Josianic reform propaganda. The second redaction of the DH, according to Cross, was that of an exilic editor (Dtr^2) who "retouched or overwrote the Deuteronomistic work to bring it up to date in the Exile, to record the fall of Jerusalem, and to reshape the history, with a minimum of reworking, into a document relevant to exiles for whom the bright expectations of the Josianic era were hopelessly past" (285). Cross dates the second redaction of the DH around 550 B.C.E. Themes attributed to the Dtr^2 include calls for repentance and hope for restoration. The major innovation of Cross was to assert that there was an earlier redaction of the DH, which dated to the time of King Josiah, countering Noth's argument for the compositional unity of the DH. Cross, like Noth, dated the final redaction of the DH around the 6th century B.C.E. Unlike Noth, Cross did not assume the Dtr was an "honest broker," giving an "objective" view of Israel's past; Cross saw the potential for royal propaganda.

The Göttingen school, led by Rudolf Smend, saw some Deuteronomistic texts as clearly composite. ("The Law and the Nations. A Contribution to Deuteronomistic Tradition History," in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville, trans. Daniels, P.T. [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000], 95–110). Smend and the Göttingen school are similar to both Noth and Cross in that all assume an exilic setting. However, the Göttingen school argues against Noth's assertion of a single author-redactor, arguing instead for layers of Deuteronomistic redaction, challenging Noth's thesis of a unified DH. Also, the Göttingen school differs from Cross in method and scale. The Göttingen school begins at the level of the sentence, parsing individual lines of text to see some as composite, while Cross looks for themes and trends (95).

judges," if such a time ever existed.[70] Therefore, a growing body of scholars date Judges

to a post-exilic or even Hellenistic period and argue that it reflects the problems and

peculiarities of much later redactor(s) and audience. For example, Niels Peter Lemche

argues that Judges is an ideologically-driven myth of origin that is the product of literary

imagination and does not reflect a historical period of the judges, but a time much later

(perhaps Persian or Hellenistic).[71] Likewise, Berquist argues that the DH (which includes

Judges) most probably dates to the Persian period when there was greater infrastructure

and capacity for the creation and preservation of texts. He asserts that the DH serves

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[70] Raymond F. Person, *The Deuteronomic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002); Thomas C. Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History* (London: T & T Clark, 2007). Raymond Person offers detailed text critical evidence of a post-exilic Deuteronomistic redaction, arguing that the numerous additions of characteristic Deuteronomistic language made to the Masoretic Text, but not included in the earlier Hebrew text used to create a Greek translation, point to a post-exilic final redaction (42). Moreover, Person argues that the themes of repentance and restoration, ordinarily considered germane to exilic production, would not be anachronistic to a post-exilic context. Similar themes would be appropriate in post-exilic Judah, particularly in a community struggling to build the Temple, facing internal and external conflicts. The Deuteronomic school, according to Person, interprets Israel's destruction by the Assyrians and Babylonians as judgment for disobeying the LORD, and the Persian conquest of Babylon and the return and restoration as fulfillment of the LORD'S plan. Person does not postulate that there was no exilic setting for the DH, but that the DH underwent numerous redactional changes throughout the long duration of its redaction, even into the post-exilic period (56). Person's convictions that the DH is the product of a Deuteronomic school and likely had a much longer redaction history are compelling. He describes this Deuteronomic school as a "scribal guild that was active in the Babylonian exile and Persian period and had its origins in the bureaucracy of the monarchy" (42).

In further discussion of ancient scribal activity, Thomas Römer (2007) writes that it was the task of these scribes to keep archives, tax records, annals (diplomatic correspondence, law books), and records of memorable events (42). Although it is likely that the king supported their work, Römer indicates that the scribes probably had some degree of independence, since kings were not always literate (47). Person argues that this scribal class was part of the ruling class exiled by the Babylonians. This scribal class probably also wrote in exile (Person 2002, 58). When Cyrus, the Persian king, defeated Babylon, he allowed exiles to return and supported the building of local temples. Shortly after the death of Cyrus, Persian king Darius I gained control of the throne and supported the reestablishment of religious literature associated with the restored local temples. The Deuteronomic school would have been the most obvious choice for this task. See also: Robert P Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 1st American ed, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 67; A. Graeme Auld, "Prophets Through the Looking Glass: A Response," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27 (1983): 15.

[71] Niels Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 130.

Persian interests (perhaps even the product of Persian imperial scribes) by denigrating Israel's ability to govern itself.[72]

If we date the book of Judges to a time much later than the presumed date of the events reported, we are free from attempting to align the events reported with archaeological and historical evidence. This allows us to see the stories as something other than historical reports of early Israel. Thomas L. Thompson refers to the Bible as a book of origins, not a "history of events." "Origins," he writes, "belong to the intellectual and literary worlds, not to the world of events, either political or social."[73] Rather than understanding the Bible as an historical account of a people, Thompson refers to it as "survival literature." It is the literature of a people who understand themselves as survivors, who bear witness to their tradition. As survival literature, the exile plays an important role in the biblical tradition, but not as an historical event, but as "a metaphor for the psychological events from which new beginnings are launched."[74] Thompson writes, "The radical trauma of exile is used as a literary paradigm by which the collectors of the tradition identify both themselves and the tradition as belonging to 'the way of the *torah*'."[75]

I will read the book of Judges as a literary invention that serves as a medium for the people of Israel to understand their present more than a reflection of the past. As such, I see the book as the product of a post-exilic, Persian-era Yehud using the stories of the judges to reflect on the return from exile and the struggle to reenter the land, (re)establish

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[72] Berquist, "Identities and Empire: Historiographic Questions for the Deuteronomistic History in the Persian Period." See also: Klaas Spronk, "The Book of Judges as a Late Construct," in *Historiography and Identity (Re)formulation in Second Temple Historiographical Literature*, ed. Louis Jonker (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 15–28.

[73] Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology And The Myth Of Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 31.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid., 32.

a geographic and social space, create governance system, and manage the many and varied relationships between those who had remained in the land and those who returned to the land after exile.

Judges in a Persian Context

Many of the details of the stories featured in Judges fit a post-exilic, Persian era context. In Judges, the people return to the land of Canaan after a long journey, reentering a land that they once occupied, though several generations ago. There is a sense of entitlement to the land, but an inability to take possession of all that they feel is theirs. Therefore, the Israelites must live in the land among other peoples who have settled the land since they left. The story line of Judges follows a similar trajectory to that of the *golah* community of post-exilic Yehud. As the *golah* community returned from exile, they were confronted by a community of Israelite peasants who, since they were left behind during the exile, began to live in and farm the land left behind by the wealthy persons who were taken to Babylon. Issues of land possession were rife in the post-exilic Yehud community, as the *golah* community believed that the land they left would still belong to them upon return.[76] Additionally, there were issues of integrating the returning and remaining communities, each of which had different experiences, different traumas, and had developed different ways of constituting community during and after the exile.

There is no simple way to define the Israelite community in post-exilic Yehud. Israel's identity construction is rife with internal and external struggles for power and

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[76] Rainer Kessler writes, "…the impoverished people took possession of the exiles' landed property, and, in the initial period Gedaliah officially encouraged this. On the other hand, the banished upper class survived as a social group during the Babylonian exile, and they never surrendered their claim to the land. The opportunity to return to Judah thus portended a conflict situation in continuity with the pre-exilic situation and, yet at the same time, contained elements of discontinuity." *The Social History of Ancient Israel: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 135.

control over the community. Understanding the dynamics of the internal and external struggle for economic, political, religious, and social control will help us appreciate and understand the identity politics of post-exilic Israel.

Internal Social Dynamics

John Kessler's work on understanding the *golah* community as a charter group draws out some of the religious and sociopolitical dynamics of Persian Yehud.[77] Kessler draws on the work of Canadian sociologist, John Porter, to define charter groups as an elite group of people that move into a region and establish a power base that in turn creates a sociological and cultural structure that is separate and distinct from the existing power structure.[78] A charter group could be the first ethnic group to inhabit a previously unpopulated region, or they may have to defeat indigenous groups in order to make their claim. Either way, a charter group is an ethnically defined elite, new to a geographical region, with the power to develop its own sociopolitical structure. This allows the charter group to dominate key religious, political, economic institutions while remaining a relatively insular group that identifies itself based on its origin.

Kessler sees the *golah* community as a refounding charter group that had control over key sociopolitical institutions. The *golah* community already had genealogical connections to the former ruling elite of Israel, in addition to increased literacy rates, experience at self-organization and administration, and probable bilingualism. Moreover, the *golah* community had the attention of the Persian throne, which provided personnel

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[77] John Kessler, "Persia's Loyal Yahwists: Power Identity and Ethnicity in Achaemenid Yehud," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschitz and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 91–121.

[78] John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 202. Porter has similar interests as Bourdieu as both are interested in how power used, manipulated, and shared in societies. Porter defines power as "the recognized right to make effective decisions on behalf of a group of people" (202). He does not limit power to politics, but argues that power is found in all social institutions.

and finances for the repopulation of the area, and permitted the returning elites to install and perpetuate their own traditions, including provisions for rebuilding the temple. This established a situation where the returning community had a good deal more power over those remaining in the land, but also a significant amount of power over the elements of Yahwistic constituency. This is a substantial amount of power, given the diversity of the Yahwistic population of the time. A large Yahwistic population in Samaria to the north contained both those who were descendants of the inhabitants of the northern kingdom and those who were settled in the region by the Assyrians. A sizeable Jewish community existed in Egypt and in the larger Mesopotamian region. By Kessler's estimation, the *golah* community not only had power over those who remained in the land, but those who were practicing YHWHism in more far-reaching places.[79]

External Social Dynamics

If we set the final redaction of Judges in a post-exilic setting, not only must we consider the degree to which it is "survival literature," and its function in the context of a community rejoined after exile, but also the degree to which it is a story composed to fit imperial interests. In this light, the story is not just a piece of literature written by the Israelites in order to understand their own experience, but literature written by the Israelites, influenced by Persian support (or coercion) to write a story that would ultimately make Israel the kind of nation-state that would be easily ruled by Persia.

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[79] Kessler, *The Social History of Ancient Israel*, 138; Joel Weinberg, *The Citizen-Temple Community* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah," in *Second Temple Studies: Persian Period*, ed. Philip R. Davies (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 22–53. Kessler's work follows Joel Weinberg's "citizen-temple community" thesis. Weinberg hypothesizes that Persian-era Judah was organized around the Temple, which was run by a privileged group of citizens. Weinberg assumes that the golah community took responsibility for building the temple after exile and was supported by the Persian Empire, to the exclusion of the native population. The golah community then reserved the right to control temple operations solely for themselves, which gave them a great deal of power.

Berquist argues that Persian imperial scribes could well have authored the DH. Not only did the Persians have the resources to produce an archival preservation, but they also had strong motives for sponsoring such a work. Berquist observes that the DH explains why the Yehudite community does not govern itself. Their state was lost to the Babylonian empire in military conflict, which was the fault of their political leaders. Furthermore, the DH demonstrates that none of Israel's leaders were capable of serving the people. Certainly Judges fits this paradigm, with each story illustrating the limited, and circumstantial success of a haphazard leader. Therefore, Israel not only cannot govern itself, but also needs imperial governance in order to protect their interests.[80] An imperially sponsored DH constructs Israel's identity in an imperial context, forming the reader's identity as part of the imperial power.

Seth Schwartz takes this further to argue that the Persians practically created the nations that they ruled. Schwartz contrasts the Persians to the Assyrians and Babylonians. The Assyrians and Babylonians were mainly interested in collecting tribute from their subjects and treated those unable to pay with great brutality. By comparison, Cyrus seemed like a liberator who promised to restore displaced peoples to their gods and reverse the deportations of the Babylonians. Though the Persian rhetoric was likely full of liberation and restoration, "[i]n practice," Schwartz writes, "the Persians tended to patronize native oligarchies, preferably those with strong connections to temples, and encouraged them to try to regulate the legal and economic activities of their provinces."[81] Schwartz cites Egyptian texts that indicates that Darius I appointed a committee of

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[80] Berquist, "Identities and Empire: Historiographic Questions for the Deuteronomistic History in the Persian Period," 7.

[81] Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2009), 21.

Egyptian priests to create a code of Egyptian law. Artaxerxes or other Persian emperors may have had a similar tactic with respect to authoritative texts for the Jews. In this way, Persian policies essentially created a whole nation for the Jews.[82]

Noting that nearly every imperial and native ruler of Palestine from Darius I to Nero supported the Temple in Jerusalem, Schwartz concludes that the God-Temple-Torah ideological complex that became the central symbol system for Jews of the first century was imperially supported, and perhaps even imperially imposed.[83] This was a mutually beneficial relationship. Not only did emperors support the Temple, but the Temple also supported the emperors (politically, economically, and ritually).[84] Schwartz writes, "it is likely that the Pentateuch itself was, if not compiled, then at least adopted as the Judean law code at the initiative of the Persian emperors."[85] As an imperially supported law code, the authority of the Torah lay with the empire, not with any consensus of the Jews.

The social world of this era is fluid. Israelite identity is uncertain. There is an internal struggle within the Israelite community to develop (and control) a post-exilic community and communal identity. There is also an external struggle as Persia attempts to impose a national identity on a fledgling Israelite community that is barely acquainted with itself. Placed in a post-exilic context, the preoccupation with space in Judges is put into perspective. There is an underlying anxiety that Israel will not have a space, or that it will be swallowed whole in a spatial/social void. Defining the boundaries of the

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[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 52.
[84] Ibid., 55.
[85] Ibid. Schwartz is not the first to take this point of view. The Pentateuch Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature asserts that a post-exilic priestly writer was responsible for the creation of a master narrative of the Pentateuch. See: Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid, eds., *A Farewell to the Yahwist?: The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (Leiden: Society of Biblical Lit, 2006).

community, geographically, physically, and socially, is the chief work the book must

perform.

The Trajectory of this Work

Some interpreters have decided that the book of Judges is a story about the

consequences of apostasy, syncretism, and moral degradation.[86] Others have shown that

the book clearly demonstrates the need for a king,[87] while still others have found that the

book illustrates the horrors of kingship.[88] I argue that, if we read with attention for the

spaces of the stories in Judges, many of these concerns can be traced back to an anxiety

about space. My analyses of the three selected tales demonstrate how each text deals with

finding a home space, managing cohabitation expectations with those in the land, the

consequences of finding and transgressing boundaries, and struggling with a colonial

identity and "stranger" status and the impact this has on bodily boundaries and spaces.

Finally, I suggest that reading Judges back into a Persian-era imperial context perhaps

even the product of Persian scribes, may make sense of the layered and multiple

identity(ies) of Israel.

I read three texts in Judges to illustrate the role narrative spatial construction plays

in our understanding of the story content (via analysis of plot, character, theme, etc.).

Narrative spatial construction also informs our understanding of textual rhetoric,

especially how these texts may have functioned as communal literary space in the Persian

period. I focus on the interrelationship between narrative spaces in the story and the

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[86] Schneider, *Judges*, xv.

[87] Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 116.

[88] David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible, II* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 87.

fragmentation, fluidity, and foreignness of identity in Judges. In each story, a complicated relationship to empire and self is revealed.

Telling stories is part of the way new communities are formed. Stories about the old place, the new place, and the dislocation help reorient a community to a new identity relative to the spatial and temporal dislocation caused by migration and relocation. Identity is fragmented, and fluid in the book of Judges. The use of critical space theory to read these Judges stories attempts to understand how these narratives use storied space to (de)construct a collective "we" after the trauma of journey and reimplacement.

Chapter Two:

Analytical Tools:
Three Critical Space Theorists

I have chosen three spatial theorists to aid in the analysis of space in three stories from the book of Judges. Each of these theorists brings a unique perspective on space. Philosopher Edward Casey has a strongly phenomenological discussion of place. He offers sturdy, universal categories, such as "journey," "home," "homecoming" and "homesteading." The book of Judges is framed as return from the exodus, which makes Casey's journey, homecoming, and homesteading language especially relevant. Sociologist Tim Cresswell and post-colonial theorist Sara Ahmed each attend to the more contested nature of space and place, particularly issues of power. The much more contextualized work of Cresswell and Ahmed will help analyze the type of social negotiation that must happen in shared spaces.

In order to understand and appreciate the way in which space and place are discussed in the work that follows, we must understand how space and place have been theorized in the past. This brief narration of the history of space and place will provide some context for the work of Casey, Cresswell, and Ahmed. This is followed by a discussion of each of the three theorists, concluding with consideration for how each member of the triad augment and complicates each other.

Defining Space and Place

When we think about space in popular discourse, it is often *outer space* that springs to mind. Abstract notions of Euclidean (geometric) space are often our first

definitions of space. Indeed, for much of modernity, space has been an abstract concept

that conveys the sense of emptiness ("a spatial void"). For example, one of the major

debates in modernity regarding space has been the difference between relative and

absolute space. René Descartes (1596-1650 CE) argues that space and place indicate

positions relative to other bodies; that is, space varies depending on a reference point

used to determine the position of space/place (relative space).[1] Isaac Newton (1643-1727)

challenges the notion of relative space with his concept of absolute space, which is a

static container that is an immutable, infinite, three-dimensional (Euclidean) precondition

for matter and existence.[2] Immanuel Kant (1724-1804 C.E.) thinks of relative and

absolute space as intertwined spatial concepts. Kant argues that the experience of space

is relative to the body and that the human body is the initial reference point for

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[1] René Descartes, "The Principles of Philosophy," in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth Sanderson Haldane and George Robert Thomson Ross, vol. 1 (New York: Dover, 1955), 201–302. See also: Mark K. George, "Space and History: Siting Critical Space for Biblical Studies," in *Constructions of Space I: Theory, Geography, and Narrative*, ed. Jon L. Berquist and Claudia V. Camp (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 19.

[2] Isaac Newton, *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. I. Bernard Cohen and Anne Miller Whitman (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1999). Newton does not deny the existence of relative space, but readily acknowledges it, even in his definition of absolute space:

> Absolute space, of its own nature without reference to anything external, always remains homogeneous and immovable. Relative space is movable measure or dimension of this absolute space; such a measure or dimension is determined by our senses from the situation of the space with respect to bodies and is popularly used for immovable space, as in the case of space under the earth or in the air or in the heavens, where the dimension is determined from the situation of space with respect to the earth. Absolute and relative space are the same in species and in magnitude, but they do not always remain the same numerically. For example, if the earth moves, the space of our air, which in a relative sense and with respect to the earth always remains the same, will now be one part of the absolute space into which the air passes, now another part of it, and thus will be changing continually in an absolute sense. Ibid., 409.

Newton's first law of motion ("Every body continues in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a right line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed upon it.") depends on absolute space, because it requires a reference system different from that of any arbitrary relative space. Newton believes that absolute space gives a final degree of accuracy. Isaac Newton, *Sir Isaac Newton's Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy and His System of the World*, ed. R. T Crawford, trans. Andrew Motte and Florian Cajori (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1934). See also Max Jammer, *Concepts of Space: The History of Theories of Space in Physics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 101; George, "Space and History: Siting Critical Space for Biblical Studies," 20.

experiencing space.[3] However, since absolute space is not something that we can sense

(using one of our five senses), but rather is a concept that makes sensation possible, Kant

argues that a body's reference to absolute space can only be understood through

comparison with other bodies.[4] Each of these definitions of space keeps space in the

abstract.

During the 19th century, time began to receive more focus than space.[5] Edward

Soja, a contemporary human geographer, critiques the primacy of time over space,

writing,

> Something happened in the late 19th century to reconstitute the more spatio-temporally balanced Kantian inheritance. …Time and History thus absconded with the dynamics of human and societal development – agency, evolution, revolution, change, modernization, biography, the entire ontological story line of the 'becoming' of being and sociality – while the empirical dead weight of space and geography was shuttled into the background as extra-social environment, a stage for the real action of making history.[6]

At the same time as the rise of history and temporally-based inquiries, "modern

geography" began to take shape, exhibiting many of the same characteristics as history,

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[3] George, "Space and History: Siting Critical Space for Biblical Studies," 22.

[4] Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Inaugural Dissertation and Early Writings on Space*, trans. John Handyside (Chicago: Open Court, 1929), 28. Kant offers the following distinction between relative and absolute (or universal) space:

> In anything extended the position of parts relatively to one another can be adequately determined from consideration of the thing itself; but the region towards which this ordering of parts is directed involves reference to the space outside the thing; not, indeed, to points in this wider space – for this would be nothing else but the position of the parts of the thing in an outer relation – but to universal space as a unity of which every extension must be regarded as a part. Ibid., 20.

Kant's concept of absolute space is a mental scheme of constructed relations. It may help to consider how Kant thinks about knowledge in order to understand his concept of absolute space. Kant identifies two types of knowledge: (1) *a posteriori* knowledge, which is based on experience; and (2) *a priori* knowledge, which is universal, exists prior to human experience, and is simply known to be true. Absolute space falls into the *a priori* knowledge category because Kant understands it as real, but prior to our perception of such a space.

[5] Prior to this, space and time were thought together. For example, Newton writes about absolute space and time in the same paragraph. Also, as Soja observes, Kant conceived of the historical and geographical imaginations together as "the entire circumference of our perception." Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 168.

[6] Ibid.

as a scientific endeavor. The discipline of geography concerned itself primarily with empirical, objective, map-able, and mathematically quantifiable spaces (i.e. physics, cartography).[7] Space was collapsed and folded into "mental space" and removed from material social reality.[8]

The late 20th century marks a spatial "turn" in disciplines such as sociology, cultural studies, and literary studies. In the 1970s, human geographers began to rethink geography away from its positivist roots as "spatial science," and questioned accepted notions of space as a neutral container or a blank canvas filled by human activity.[9] Human geographers were not interested in constructing scientific theories or "spatial laws" as philosophers and physicists had in the past, but were interested in interpreting space as socially produced and socially consumed. The definition of space shifted once more, this time away from abstract space and positivist definitions, and toward material and metaphorical definitions of space.

In the 1970s and 1980s space began to be conceived as inherently social. The move away from positivist understandings of space was encouraged by philosophers such as Henri Lefebvre, who raised the question, "what exactly is the mode of existence of social relationships?"[10] He arrives at the conclusion, "Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. *Their underpinning is*

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[7] Jon L Berquist, "Critical Spatiality and the Construction of the Ancient World," in *"Imagining" Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs in Honour of James W. Flanagan*, ed. Paula McNutt (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 15–17. Berquist briefly discusses the developments of physical geography in the 20th century, citing in particular the work of Albert Einstein and his contributions on the interrelations between space, time, matter, and energy, and the work of mathematicians on fractal geometry, which has problematized our notions of scale in space.

[8] Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989), 125.

[9] Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin, and Gill Valentine, eds., *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (London: Sage, 2004), 4.

[10] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 129.

spatial."[11] Lefebvre's work lead to the construal of social space and definitions of space

like that by Massey, who writes, "The spatial is socially constituted. 'Space' is created

out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, of the interlocking and the non-

interlocking, and the network of relations at every scale from local to global."[12]

Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) shares Lefebvre's concern for the "everyday"

experience, engagement, and (re)production of space – in other words, the ordinary ways

in which spaces are used and the social relationships of those spaces.[13] In *The Practice of*

Everyday Life, de Certeau's brings to light the power systems of a culture and the ways in

which the everyday actions of users of ordinary spaces are concealed. He argues that,

"Everyday life invents itself by *poaching* in countless ways on the property of others."[14]

Thus, many everyday practices are "tactical", like clever "tricks" designed to get away

with things.[15] In this way, the consumption of space is a kind of underground production

of space.[16]

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[11] Ibid., 404. Emphasis original.

[12] Doreen B. Massey, "Politics and Space/Time," in *Place and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Steve Pile and Michael Keith (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 1993), 153.

[13] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), xxiv. Lefebvre and Bourdieu share De Certeau's concern for the every day. For Lefebvre, everyday life is the collection of activities and things that are repetitive and boring, which had been ignored by social theorists throughout the 20th century who were primarily focused on events and institutions. To critique "everyday" life is to begin to theorize why everyday life is boring. This is directly related to Lefebvre's interest and concern about alienation. Lefebvre is interested in what happens when we become so alienated from our everyday life and boredom becomes so deeply seated that we drift off into daydreams and fantasies. Both Bourdieu and de Certeau are studying "practices" (what Bourdieu calls *habitus*) or repetitive behaviors, which they believe are the central example of non-intentional, politically relevant agency, and the way in which "practices" form social spaces (or fields, to use Bourdieu's terminology). Both Bourdieu and de Certeau are interested in the ways in which "users" or the "dominated" are co-opted into their own domination through their *habitus*, or everyday practice. Likewise, both social thinkers are interested in the ways in which "users" or the "dominated" react to these subtle and pervasive forms of domination. See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; David Swartz, *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love, and Struggle* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[14] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xii.

[15] Ibid., xix. De Certeau uses the terms "strategy" and "tactic" to describe what he means by the "poaching" of space. Strategies are "actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power (the

Human geographers such as David Harvey and Yi-Fu Tuan entirely changed the

field of geography by introducing space as a critical category. Harvey understands space

as relational, existing only in relationship to other things. He writes,

> The problem of the proper conceptualization of space is resolved through human
> practice with respect to it. In other words, there are no philosophical answers to
> philosophical questions that arise over the nature of space – the answers lie in
> human practice. The question 'what is space?' is therefore replaced by the
> question 'how is it that different human practices create and make use of
> distinctive conceptualizations of space?'[17]

Harvey's general understanding of space as relative, relational, and constructed,

together with his use of Marx's theory of capitalism, has lead him to analyze how capital

investments in geographical landscape are mechanisms to stave off economic crisis in

capitalist economies.[18]

Tuan takes a more phenomenological approach, seeking to address the question of

how human beings acquire concepts of space and place.[19] Tuan argues that we learn

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property of a proper), elaborate theoretical places (systems and totalizing discourses) capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed" (38) This is in contrast to tactics, which are the "art of the weak" (38).

[16] It is worth noting that de Certeau inverts the definitions of space and place compared to Lefebvre. He defines place as "the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence." Space is simply practiced place, but specifically, "the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities" (117).

[17] David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City (Revised Edition)* (Athens, GA, USA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 14–15.

[18] David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (New York: Verso Books, 1999).

[19] Phenomenologists study essences, particularly the essence of perception or the essence of consciousness, and give descriptions (not explanations or analysis) of experiences. All knowledge in and of the world is gained through experience in the world. Although they believe that the world preexists our experience of it, phenomenologists do not assert the preexistence of "truths" about the world: our ideas about the way the world works are constructed and produced based on our experience of the world, which is influenced by our perspective (culture, gender, geographical location, etc). For example, phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) argues that the body is one of our main resources for understanding space. Space is not a "void" or a "container" that must be filled. Rather, it is through a dynamic relationship between body and world that objects and subjects come into being and space takes shape. Our concrete knowledge of space is centered on our bodies: the way in which we define "here" and "there" or "near" and "far" is relative to our bodies. See: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962); Monika M. Langer, *Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception: A Guide and Commentary* (Tallahassee: The Florida State

space quickly and well, not through formal instruction but through experience, on a

subconscious level.[20] The upright posture of the human body is the basis for orienting

human beings in the world. Spatial prepositions (on, up, over, etc.) and spatial distances

and values are understood in reference to the body.[21] Space is defined as "having room in

which to move."[22] Space is transformed into place when it is experienced and given

definition and meaning (experience constructs place).[23]

Like Tuan, Edward Casey brings a phenomenological point of view. He pushes

back against the subordination of space to time, but also the subordination of place to

space, arguing for the importance of place in our experience of the world.[24] Casey argues

that we are primarily in place through our bodies. Because we have bodies that live and

act in the world, space (and time, for that matter) is not simply a collection of points or

abstract relations, but it is synthesized by our consciousness so that our bodies become

our anchors in the world, even the medium through which we have a world. Casey writes,

"This body, my body, is not only the continuing source of my own oriented implacement

in the life-world; it is the abiding resource of all the places I know, in whatever regions

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University Press, 1989); Eric Matthews, *Merleau-Ponty: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006).

[20] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space And Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 200.

[21] Ibid., 37.

[22] Ibid., 12.

[23] Ibid., 136.

[24] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993). It is very difficult to conceive of time outside of the mind, and whenever we try to conceptualize time, we spatialize it. A timeline, for example, is inherently spatial, a continuous, linear, external "diagram" of time in spatial form. Time is also *placial*: time is constituted "by means of *positions*, that is, a series of points arranged on the line and grasped, all together, *as* the line" (9). Therefore, Casey's thesis in *Getting Back into Place* is that time is an extension of place, that place and time are akin to each other, but that place is the "first among equals" because "to exist at all as a (material or mental) object or as (an experienced or observed) event is to have a place – *to be implaced*, however minimally or imperfectly or temporally" (13).

they may come to be gathered. My lived body is the locatory agent of lived places, the subtender of sites, the *genius loci* of all that has come to be called "space" in the West."[25]

Casey, Cresswell, and Ahmed all follow a constructivist understanding of space. They each see space and place as relational, but they also each take a different perspective on critical space through their various disciplinary backgrounds. I begin with a summary of relevant aspects of Casey's work and continue with a discussion of Cresswell and his theory of spatial power relations. Finally, I consider Ahmed and her post-colonial understanding of space.

Edward Casey

Casey opens his work with a question: "Can you imagine what it would be like if there were no places in the world?"[26] He goes on to suggest that the thought-experiment is nearly impossible, or at the very least disturbing to imagine a whole world without a single place to anchor one's self. He writes:

> Our lives are so place-oriented and place-saturated that we cannot begin to comprehend, much less face up to, what sheer placelessness would be like. For just this reason, we rarely pause to consider what being no place or having no place might mean. Even when we are displaced, we continue to count upon *some* reliable place, if not our present precarious perch then a place-to-come or a place-that-was. While we easily imagine or project an ideal (or merely a better) place-to-be and remember a number of good places we have been, we find that the very idea, even the bare image, of no-place-at-all occasions the deepest anxiety.[27]

The very idea of placelessness can elicit an emotional response (homesickness, depression, desolation, etc.). Natural human apprehension about placelessness goes hand-in-hand with the fact that the place we occupy comes to define us. Without place, our

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[25] Ibid., 105.; Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 143.
[26] Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, ix.
[27] Ibid.

very existence comes into question. "Where we are–the place we occupy, however briefly–has everything to do with what and who we are (and finally, *that* we are)."[28]

Casey suggests that we are in place primarily through our own bodies, which orient us in terms of dimension and directionality.[29] Bodies need places – they need places to live, dwell, and move between. It is not just that we experience place through our bodies (using our senses to encounter place), but bodies create places. They build physical structures (such as homes, temples, palaces, and even towns and cities). They also socially construe a place (a place is home or an office or a temple because of the kinds of things bodies do in those spaces). Casey is careful, however, to say that place is not constituted by bodies (even without bodies, there is place), but place and bodies are "congruent counterparts:" they need each other. Place is where the body is (where else could it be?), but the converse is also true: body is where place is. Casey argues that to exist at all as an object (be it mental or material) or an event (be it experienced or observed) is to have place.[30]

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[28] Ibid., xiii.

[29] Casey draws on the work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*Phenomenology of Perception*) who argues that the body is one of our main resources for understanding space. He disputes the idea of space as a "void" or a "container" that must be filled. Rather, it is through a dynamic relationship between body and world that objects and subjects come into being and space takes shape. Our concrete knowledge of space is centered on our bodies: the way in which we define "here" and "there" or "near" and "far" is relative to our bodies. Because we have bodies that live and act in the world, space (and time, for that matter) is not simply a collection of points or abstract relations, but it is synthesized by our consciousness so that our bodies become our anchors in the world, even the medium through which we have a world. Although Merleau-Ponty would not argue against scientific understandings of absolute space or more "objectivist" notions of space, he nevertheless contends that the opposition between objective and subjective, experiential forms of knowing is too stark. He would not dismiss the existence of absolute space, but would argue that people do not routinely experience space as absolute. For example, it is a well-known scientific fact that the revolution of the earth produces the effect of sunrise and sunset. However, the everyday experience of sunrise and sunset is not the sensation of the earth's revolution, but a sensation that the sun is rising and setting because of the perspective of the human body. In other words, the objective, Copernican fact of the earth's revolution does not invalidate the experience of the embodied subject. See also: Langer, *Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception: A Guide and Commentary*; Matthews, *Merleau-Ponty*.

[30] Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 13.

It is rare, however, that a body will remain in one fixed place. Bodies move between places, and therefore movement is an important part of what it means to be in place. Moving between places foregrounds the impermanence of place and our experience of place. Even so, all motion eventually comes to an end: every journey has a starting place and an ending place. Casey analyzes how bodies move between places; especially how place is established and reestablished.

Though we journey through time, the story of a journey is scarcely worth telling without the mention of place: beginning-place and end-place, and all the places in between. "Not only is a journey replete with the lore of place, but it adds a crucial dimension to our understanding of what place is all about," writes Casey.[31] Places make journeys possible; being in a place holds the possibility of journey. But, all movement comes to an end, and comes back to place.[32] It need not be the same place that was left, or even one particular spot, but journeys do end and come to rest in a place. The book of Judges is essentially a story about the end of the journey in the wilderness and the beginning of co-habitancy in a new land.

Casey writes that the ends of most journeys fall into two extreme categories: homesteading and homecoming. He defines homesteading as journeying to a new place that will become a future home-place. Typically, the homesteading place is not known to those attempting to inhabit it, or it is only known anecdotally. In homesteading, one commits to remaining in the new place for an amount of time ample enough to build a new life and significant future in the new place.[33] Homesteading is not necessarily as dramatic as moving from one country to another, but could be as simple as moving from

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[31] Ibid., 275.
[32] Ibid., 290.
[33] Ibid.

one city to another in pursuit of work or family. "All that matters," affirms Casey, is the commitment "to remaining in the new place for a stretch of time sufficient for building a significant future life there, sometimes for several generations."[34]

Homecoming, by contrast, is a return to the same place one left. Here, the length of time spent in the place is less important than returning to the same location – homecoming could simply be a short visit. It is about returning to a place that may have changed in the meantime. Homecoming is not just coming back to a particular spot, an identical location, or a place one once knew. It involves managing the memories and expectations of a place.[35]

Parts of Israel's emergence in the land seem to reflect a homesteading impulse, while other aspects seem to reflect a homecoming. On the one hand, the overarching story of Judges reflects a homecoming several generations removed. The Israelites have returned to the land of Canaan after 400 years (roughly 12 generations) in Egypt, only to discover that much has changed in the meantime.[36] Other peoples now live in the land and have no intention of making space for the Israelite newcomers. There seems to be some cultural memory of the land of their ancestors and an expectation that the space belongs to Israel. Israel must negotiate their cultural and collective memory of the place with the present reality. On the other hand, as Casey describes it, homecoming is usually a temporary end of a journey. It implies only a visit, and then a return trip to one's place of residence. It is clear that the Israelites have no intention of returning to Egypt. They intend to make their permanent home in Canaan. In this sense, the larger narrative of

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] There is a clear parallel here between the story world of the text, which reports a 400 year hiatus from the land. The exile to Babylon had a similar effect in terms of the community's absence from the land, though the exile lasted a mere generation (perhaps a generation and a half).

Judges reflects a homesteading impulse. Judges seems to straddle these homecoming/homesteading definitions in an especially delicate way.

In either scenario, both homesteading and homecoming involve re-implacement. Both assume an initial implacement followed by a displacement – the journey itself. The journey may involve multiple displacements, such as Israel's wilderness wanderings, which involved not only geographic displacement, but also social, economic displacement, and political displacement. Leaving a place means more than just physically moving, but also requires a community to reconsider its social structure, how it supports itself, and leadership. Re-implacement means finding an end to the journey that is comparatively stable.[37]

Finally, both homesteading and homecoming require co-habitancy. Casey writes that homesteading co-habitancy can only be achieved as something more than forced exploitation if there is a "concerted and prolonged co-habitation" between the homesteader and those in the land. This is exceedingly difficult to achieve. He writes, "homesteading flourishes when it attains the equipoise of co-habitancy. Indeed, without the realization of a certain minimal co-habitancy, homesteading becomes abortive or self-defeating."[38] Homecoming co-habitancy is different. In a homecoming scenario, a group must establish a series of alliances with those who still remain in the land, those who used to be in the land but have left (whether they have moved or died), as well as managing memories and expectations of the place. Casey contrasts this with homesteading co-habitancy, writing:

> The co-habiting is not now with a new place and an open future–both of which demand prolonged effort–but with a known place and a past remembered in that

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[37] Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 291.
[38] Ibid.

place, as well as a past *of that place* in the present. What counts is not a continuing investment in a place but the intensity and quality of my current experience in returning there.[39]

Aside from the re-implacement and co-habitancy that must happen with the ending of each journey, ending-places also involve what Casey calls *habitat-habitus*. He writes:

> A habitat-place embraces and supports the ending itself, and as such is paradigm of that placial permanence which we have seen to be a condition of possibility for all journeying. As in the case of habitats of other species, we find ourselves at ease and at home in this kind of place; here we can be 'ethical' in the originary sense of this word, which implies a community of like-minded (but not necessarily like-bodied) creatures.[40]

This implies that to enter (or reenter) a habitat is to have the right skills and knowledge to do so. In order to (re)inhabit a place, one must come to accept the preestablished terms of habitation, and abide by the way of life of the place laid down long before the emergence of homesteaders or homecomers. One must be able to think about and articulate ideas and thoughts in ways that resonate with the place. Casey calls this "showing solidarity with a region."[41]

The end-of-journey inhabitation and co-habitancy has a real and immediate impact on the nature of a place and the identity of the people that reside in it. Identity, Casey argues, is inextricably linked to implacement. *Where* something or someone is located is an important, determining property of *who* or what the person or object is. Casey writes, "it is evident that our innermost sense of personal identity (and not only our

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 292.
[41] Ibid., 295.

overt, public character) deeply reflects our implacement. It follows that threats to this implacement are also threats to our entire sense of well-being."[42]

When co-habitancy turns into exploitation, place-alienation results. Place-alienation is a two-way experience; wherein the people are estranged from their place and place is alienated from the people that occupied it. The result is that:

> I feel, almost literally, 'beside myself.' I feel myself to be other than myself and not just somewhere other than where I am in world-space (e.g., my exact address, my cartographic location, etc.). Even though I am literally here in a particular place, my place is not *this* place. By the same token, this place is no longer *my* place: indeed, my place has become other to (and other than) me. The entire situation, and not just my psyche, is schizoid.[43]

Casey is describing a dialogical relationship between places and the persons who live in places. Places form people as much as people physically build and mold places. This is why place-alienation and displacement are such terrifying ideas. Places become so much a part of our identity, our awareness of ourselves, even proof of our existence, that to risk losing one's place is to risk losing one's identity. Therefore, built places (physical buildings and edifices) are more than just human-made objects, but reflections of the people who built them. Casey writes, "if places reflect the people who live in them, the very same people equally suggest the places they are from. …Persons who live in places – inhabit or re-inhabit them – come to share features with the local landscape; but equally so, they make a difference to, perhaps indelibly mark, the land in which they dwell."[44] People "indelibly mark" the land by simply dwelling in the land. They build places to eat, sleep, make laws, and worship. As people reside in a place, that place takes on the culture of the people. But, the converse is also true; people take on the essence of the places they

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[42] Ibid., 307.
[43] Ibid., 308.
[44] Ibid., 305.

reside. For example, people living in the desert have different habits and different lifestyles than people living in arctic regions. Certain necessary adaptations must be made for climate, landscape, and region. Casey writes, "People and place come together most insistently in 'regional character,' which is based on noticeable dialects, gestural styles, and whole ways of thinking."[45]

The result is that the identity of a people is shaped by the places in which they live. Place becomes so bound up with identity, that our material bodies are shaped by the places we inhabit. The way we dress, talk, move, our hairstyles, and food preferences are all shaped by our experience of place. The inevitable change of a place reflects a change in identity. To consider leaving a place is to consider a new identity. Casey describes the relationship between place and identity this way:

> We tend to identify ourselves by–and with–the places in which we reside. Since a significant part of our personal identity depends on our exact bodily configuration, it is only to be expected that dwelling places, themselves physical in structure, will resemble our own material bodies in certain quite basic respects. The resemblance, moreover, is two-way. A dwelling where we reside comes to exist in our image, but *we*, the residents, also take on a certain of *its* properties. *How we are*, our bodily being, reflects how we reside in built places.[46]

To use Casey's language, homesteading is masquerading as homecoming in the book of Judges. The Israelites seem to have made a homecoming voyage, but without any intentions of a short-term stay. The trouble, of course, is that the land and the people have changed since the Israelites last lived in the land. Those Israelites returning are generations removed from those who have left. The habitat of the place has also changed. New people live there, they have their own expectations about day-to-day life, and the emergence of the Israelites in the land disrupts that continuity. Even though Israel may

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[45] Ibid., 304.
[46] Ibid., 120.

believe they know and understand the habitat of the place from stories and anecdotes passed on from generations past, things are different now. On the one hand, Israel must deal with all the problems endemic to homecoming: managing expectations and memories of a place that was once theirs (even generations removed). On the other hand, the Israelite community faces homesteading issues: trying to find a way to live peaceably among a people without exploitation.

Tim Cresswell

This brings us to some of the social negotiations necessary to make a space habitable. The work of Tim Cresswell, notably influenced by Bourdieu, is especially helpful for understanding how the social boundaries of a place are constructed, maintained, and communicated. Cresswell's work explores how the transgression of social boundaries (a perennial occurrence in Judges) not only questions the construction of social space, but in some cases may reinforce or reinscribe social structures.

Cresswell argues that place is relational, and that one's place is determined by one's relationship with others. The boundaries around place are defined by the transgression of a place and the reaction to transgression, which determines what actions are appropriate or inappropriate in any given place. Cresswell argues that place does not simply reflect the dominant ideology, but helps create and maintain the dominant ideology through order, propriety, and "normality" in place.[47] Thus, place is created through social process.

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[47] Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 27.

Cresswell's book, *In Place/Out of Place*, explores two central ideas: (1) the ideology about what is appropriate or "right" is communicated through space; and (2) the use of space and place both to structure and to question the normative world.[48] The experience of moving and acting in place and space gives users of space an implicit, unquestioned understanding of what is "in bounds" and "out of bounds." Cresswell writes,

> places force us to link ideas and actions almost constantly. We walk on the sidewalk, kneel in the church, and drink only in the bar. The interpretation of place is, in everyday life, a practical interpretation. Our beliefs about place are usually indistinguishable from actions in place. Ideology seeks to link the concrete and the abstract.[49]

In his pursuit of these two central claims, Cresswell draws heavily upon the sociology of Bourdieu whose main interest was the sociology of symbolic power relations, particularly those between culture, social structure, and action. Bourdieu asserts that all forms of cultural symbols and practices are imbued with interests that boost social distinction. Increased social distinction correlates with increased social power. Bourdieu argues that, through experience with a field (social space), one acquires (subtly, unconsciously, over time) a *habitus* (similar to Casey's *habitat-habitus*), or a set of predispositions and inclinations that structure the way one understands and responds to the world.[50] Because of the *habitus* that is adopted, an individual has an unconscious

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[48] Ibid., 8. Cresswell's spatial analysis seems to depend almost entirely on binary oppositions. He depends on the presupposition that ideologies are always set up in opposition to something else, but never considers the possibility that ideologies may also deconstruct themselves.

[49] Ibid., 157.

[50] Bourdieu defines *habitus* as,

> a system of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations

sense of what is possible within a field and what his/her odds of success in a given field might be. Users of space, or "players" on the "field," develop a "sense for the game." The rules for engagement become ingrained, embodied, and common sense in what Bourdieu calls doxa. Of doxa, Bourdieu writes:

> Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness. Of all the mechanisms tending to produce this effect, the most important and the best concealed is undoubtedly the dialectic of the objective chances and the agents' aspirations, out of which arises the *sense of limits*, commonly called the *sense of reality*, i.e. the correspondence between the objective classes and the internalized classes, social structures and mental structures, which is the basis of the most ineradicable adherence to the established order.[51]

When doxa becomes so unconscious that it goes unquestioned, domination occurs. Persons evaluate their position in a field, and the acceptable *habitus* of that position and "tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them, refusing what they are refused ('That's not for the likes of us'), adjusting their expectations to their chances, defining themselves as the established order defines them, reproducing in their verdict on themselves the verdict the economy produces on them."[52] When persons accept their odds in a field and adjust their expectations accordingly, doxa is reproduced. For Bourdieu, doxa is crucial to the adherence to the established order, and therefore defending the doxa is in the interest of dominating groups. Conversely, the questioning of doxa is a key element of struggling against the established order.

Place plays an important role in the establishment of "norms" of behavior, and has a significant impact on the creation of transgression and deviance. Like books, places are

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necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

[51] Ibid., 164.

[52] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 471.

created by authors who attempt to create certain meanings and minimize others. But also like books, places have "readers" who read places in multiple ways, in spite of the fact that some readings are deemed more acceptable than others. In this way, places encourage "readers" of place to abide by the accepted norms of a place, play by the accepted rules of the field, and leave the doxa unquestioned. But, places require constant engagement and interpretation, which leaves them open to subordinate, discouraged interpretations, and "wrong" behaviors.

Cresswell is interested in the way in which places become a means of control, producing and reproducing the dominant ideology (doxa) that determines which behaviors are acceptable and normal. His work examines "crisis points" in the doxa upheld by places: those moments and places when the unquestioned order of things is questioned. The unintended consequence of making places a means of control, is the creation of a place as a site of meaningful resistance. One of the tools of the weak against the ideologies of the dominant is engaging in the very behavior that is determined as "inappropriate." By engaging in the wrong behaviors, place is transgressed and produced as something new. Cresswell focuses on moments of transgression, resistance, and deviance and the responses these actions elicit.

Cresswell defines transgression as those actions and events that upset the balance of "common sense." Transgressions are "out-of-place phenomena" that lead people to question what they otherwise would have assumed to be appropriate and "normal" for a particular setting. Transgression, or crossing a boundary into forbidden actions and places is sometimes necessary, according to Cresswell, before we know that the boundary ever existed. In his words, "I am arguing that although 'out of place' is logically secondary to

'in place,' it may come first existentially."[53] Transgression can be accidental. For example, nothing seems terribly out-of-place about Jephthah's vow in Judges 11:30-31, and neither does anything seem terribly out-of-place about his daughter greeting him when he returns from battle victorious. But, when these two events collide to lead narratively to the death of the girl in a rare instance of child sacrifice, we are acutely aware of the transgression of an unspoken, but deeply held value for the lives of children. Though it would not seem that it was Jephthah's intention to transgress such a boundary when he uttered the vow, his actions draw attention to a strongly held social principle for the Israelite community.

The primary difference between transgression and resistance is the issue of intentionality. Resistance implies that the actor works purposefully toward some entity with expectations of changing or overcoming some obstacle or effect produced by the entity.[54] By contrast, transgression refers to the results of the action rather than the intention of the actor.[55] Cresswell writes:

> To have *transgressed* … means to have been judged to have crossed some line that was not meant to have been crossed. The crossing of the line may or may not have been intended. Transgression is judged by those who react to it, while resistance rests on the intentions of the actor(s).[56]

The murder of Sisera by Jael could be considered an act of resistance. In Judges 4, Sisera, leader of the Canaanite army flees on foot from the battle scene against Barak and the Israelites when the confusion of battle turns to panic. Seeing him running away, Jael comes out of her tent and invites him inside, assuring him that he should have "no fear" (Judg 4:18). She offers him a blanket, gives him some milk, and covers him up. He even

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[53] Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place*, 22.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., 23.
[56] Ibid.

asks her to guard the tent for him. But, Jael clearly has other plans when she takes the tent peg and a hammer and creeps up on Sisera, and violently drives the tent peg through his temple, killing him. Jael acts purposefully and her deeds are key to overthrowing the Canaanites.

This is not to say that transgression and resistance are necessarily distinct acts. Cresswell concedes that some acts of resistance are found to be transgressions and that some transgressions provide the potential for resistance. "Intentional transgression" is one kind of resistance, which elicits a response.[57] The brief story of Achsah is one example of intentional transgression. Achsah's father, Caleb, promises his daughter to anyone who attacks Kiriath-sepher and conquers it. Othniel succeeds, and Caleb delivers on his promise. When Achsah is given to Othniel she urges him to ask her father for a parcel of land, but it is not Othniel that asks Caleb for the land. Achsah boldly asks him herself. Caleb gave her the Negeb (desert land), but she demands land with water. Caleb offers her Upper and Lower Gulloth. Achsah acts outside the expectations for a woman, negotiating for land on her own. It would be difficult to believe that she did not know that her actions broke from the expectations of the patriarchal culture; her actions are intentional. Still, this action alone is not enough to disrupt or overturn any systems of oppression. This does not quite rise to an act of resistance. It is an intentional transgression.[58]

Deviance is a form of transgression in the sense that the consequence of one's actions elicits responses, which deem the action unacceptable. In other words, groups

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Danna Nolan Fewell, "Deconstructive Criticism: Achsah and the (E)razed City of Writing," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 119–145.

create deviance by making the rules (designing the field) and deciding which violations

constitute deviant behavior. Committing deviant acts puts one outside a community, so

that deviance is not necessarily attributed to the action itself, but is a response to the

action, and a consequence of the application of the rules by others that define the actor as

deviant. There is a clear power differential here. Those with power to create and apply

rules have the power to define certain acts and certain people as deviant. "Power,"

Cresswell writes, "in many ways, is the ability to make rules for others."[59] Deviant

persons are often expelled from the community, making them "outsiders." "The term

outsider," Cresswell explains, " indicates that a person does not properly understand the

behavior expected of people in a town, region, or nation. Outsiders are often despised and

suspected of being troublemakers. They are people 'out of place.'"[60] Abimelech (Judges

10) is an example of a deviant character in the book of Judges. He rises to power because

he murders his seventy brothers. Abimelech's bloodthirsty ascension to the throne causes

the lords of Shechem to avenge Abimelech in an attempt to assert their power to enforce

the rules of the community over against any power Abimelech may have claimed for

himself.

Cresswell asserts that mobile lifestyles are understood as deviant in many

cultures. He points to Hitler's persecution of the Jews and Gypsies before and during

World War II, and Britain's Elizabethan "Acte for the Punishment of Vacabondes"

(which defined those leading mobile lifestyles as "rogues"). In each case, a mobile

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[59] Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place*, 25.
[60] Ibid.

lifestyle is understood as "deviant," a point of view that is rooted in a value for place-bound, property-owning society.[61] Cresswell observes that mobility

> appears to be a kind of superdeviance. It is not just 'out-of-place,' but disturbs the whole notion that the world can be segmented into clearly defined places. Because the easiest way to establish order is through the division of space, mobility becomes a basic form of disorder and chaos – constantly defined as transgression and trespass. It is no accident, then, that the control of mobility is foremost in the minds of those who have an interest in maintaining their own definition of order.[62]

Mobility certainly rises to "superdeviance" in Judges 18 and the story of the Danites. The Danites are a highly mobile people in the book of Judges who are characterized as a menace. They are the focus of Judges 18, where they are introduced as landless people seeking a territory for themselves. If the opening sentences were not ominous enough ("In those days there was no king in Israel" Judg 18:1), the story goes on to describe how the Danites selected and sent five men to spy on others in the land in order to find a suitable destination for settlement. If their behavior were innocent or unthreatening, it would not be necessary to act quite so surreptitiously. The reader gets the sense early on that the Danites are up to no good. As the story unfolds, the Danites find a desirable piece of land at Laish and decide to violently seize it. In the course of their siege, they take the Levite procured by Micah (whose story is told in Judges 17), threaten Micah with bodily harm and steal his idols, take the Levite to Laish, put all the people in Laish to the sword, burn the city, rebuild it, and set up the stolen idol, ephod, and Levite for their own worship center. The Danites represent a transient people who choose violence as their main mode of relating to others.

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[61] Ibid., 85.
[62] Ibid., 87.

Cresswell's observation about mobility can be thought alongside Casey's study of journeys. Casey primarily deals with the end of journeys while Cresswell helps us to think about the middle of journeys. The middle of a journey has none of the finality of the end of the journey, which gives it the potential to be even more threatening as a liminal spatial moment. This is, perhaps, why the Danites at the end of Judges are so threatening (Judges 17-18). Their constant motion in and out of established communities makes their social position ambiguous.

Part of what makes mobility, and the middle of journeys, threatening is the way in which it changes distance and proximity between people and things. For example, in the Levite's story of Judges 19, even though the Levite had not technically left Israelite territory (he even makes a point to lodge among his own people and not among the Jebusites as his servant suggests), by pausing his trip in Gibeah, his presence in Gibeah changes the proximity between Bethlehem (his departure point), Ephraim (his destination), and Gibeah. This disrupts the possibility of constructing neat categories between the three places. The Levite, and his woman who faces the consequences for the social deviation, are clearly out-of-place: they are outsiders among their own people.

Sara Ahmed

This brings us to Sara Ahmed's work with social space and strangers. In her book *Strange Encounters*, Ahmed examines the ways in which contemporary discourses of globalization and multiculturalism emphasize hybridity and liminality and how, through hybridity and liminality, discourses of globalization and multiculturalism (re)enforce

identity boundaries. As a result, the figure of the stranger is (re)produced.[63] Ahmed is

interested in examining how contemporary forms of proximity (such as globalization,

migration, and multiculturalism) reopen former histories of encounter. She begins her

analysis with post-coloniality. The very term, post-colonial, is problematic for Ahmed

because it makes colonialism the marker of difference and continues to re-center global

history around a marker of European time.[64] Ahmed takes post-colonialism to be about

"the complexity of the relationship between the past and present, between the histories of

European colonization and contemporary forms of globalization."[65] She goes on to say

that she understands post-colonialism as a failed history in the sense that

> it re-examines the centrality of colonialism to a past that henceforth cannot be
> understood as a totality, or as a shared history. It is the very argument that
> colonialism is central to the historical constitution of modernity (an apparently
> simple argument, but one that must nevertheless be repeated) that also suggests
> history is not the continuous line of the emergence of a people, but a series of
> discontinuous encounters between nations, cultures, others and other others.
> History can no longer be understood as that which determines each encounter.
> Rather, historicity involves the history of such encounters that are unavailable in
> the form of a totality.[66]

Globalization, migration, and the transnational movement of bodies, objects, and

capital have occasioned new modes of proximity that produce the figure of the stranger.[67]

Ahmed's study of strangers analyzes the complex relationship between histories of

colonialism and contemporary modes of proximity, and especially how new forms of

proximity and encounter allow for the construction of new "strangers." Encounters

between "strange cultures" and "us" are determined by the proximity and distance

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[63] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 13.
[64] Ibid., 10.
[65] Ibid., 11.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 13.

between the two. "Other cultures" are cultures that are socially and spatially distant, but they become "strange cultures" when they come too close. With the increased mobility of people, things, and ideas in the contemporary world, Ahmed argues that new opportunities for cultural exchange result in the redrawing of the lines between "strangers" and "us" to reflect the threat posed by new forms of proximity.

Although she does not draw upon Bourdieu or Cresswell, Ahmed's understanding of social space is very similar to Bourdieu's understanding of doxa. For Ahmed, a person with a sense of place is aware of his or her social location and understands how to move and who to talk to because of an ingrained sense of bodily and cultural knowledge (what Bourdieu and Cresswell might call *habitus*) and a sense of the amount and type of capital he or she has to spend in any given situation. She writes, "spaces are claimed, or 'owned' not so much by inhabiting what is already there, but by moving within, or passing through, different spaces which are only given value as places (with boundaries) through the movement or 'passing through' itself."[68] Defined ways of moving through space (*habitus*) are one way that communities differentiate between accepted and unaccepted persons. Those who understand and abide by the accepted *habitus* of a place know how to move and act in socially acceptable ways and are admitted as members of the community.

Ahmed says that social space is shaped by who is felt to belong or not belong. Value is attached to certain spaces precisely because of the specific people the space encloses (or excludes). When a community establishes a working boundary, it identifies those within the boundary as belonging, but also implicitly identifies who will constitute

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[68] Ibid., 32.

an "outsider" or stranger. A stranger is more than just someone with whom one is

unfamiliar. It is someone who does not fit the profile of an "insider." Ahmed writes,

> Strangers are not simply those who are not known in a dwelling, but those who are, in their very proximity, *already recognized as not belonging*, as being out of place. Such a recognition of those who are out of place allows both the demarcation and enforcement of the boundaries of 'this place', as where 'we' dwell. The enforcement of boundaries requires that some-body – here locatable in the dirty figure of the stranger – has already crossed the line, has already come too close: in Alfred Schutz's terms, the stranger is always approaching. The recognition of strangers is a means by which inhabitable or bounded spaces are produced ('this street'), not simply as the place or locality of residence, but as the very living form of community.[69]

When we are faced with a stranger, we recognize them as a stranger by reading

the signs on their body, "or reading their body *as* a sign."[70] We might assume that we can

tell the difference between strangers and neighbors, but in reality, our constitution of a

body as "out of place" conceals forms of social difference: identifying "us" against

"stranger" obscures the identification of some bodies as strangers and others as

neighbors.[71] Ahmed's argument is that differences are understood through the formation

of social space and bodily space, which happens through everyday encounters.[72]

It is not practical to think that communities will be able to produce purified

spaces, in which there are only neighbors and no strangers. Neither is it practical to think

that communities will succeed at being entirely self-enclosed, without any need to

journey outside the community. Therefore, it is imperative that the community

collectively defines what is safe and trustworthy and what is dangerous or hostile so that

subjects can move through space able to differentiate between the familiar and strange.

This is often couched as a discourse about "personal safety," but what is really being

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[69] Ibid., 22.
[70] Ibid., 8.
[71] Ibid., 3.
[72] In this way, Ahmed's argument is similar to that of Cresswell, above.

acknowledged is that both community insiders and outsiders (strangers) are mobile and

that clear geographic boundaries are not enough for defining a community. "Community

is not just established through the designation of pure and safe spaces, but becomes

established *as a way of moving through space*," Ahmed writes.[73] An understanding of the

accepted *habitus*[74] of a community is how community members become "street wise,"

enabling them to move in and through the community safely because they know who is a

"trusted" insider and how to maneuver around "shifty" outsiders.

Ahmed, like Casey, suggests that inhabitants shape the character of places, but the

reverse is also true. Inhabitants are shaped by the places in which they dwell. Place is an

enormous factor in identity construction and maintenance. Casey articulates it this way,

"Where something or someone is, far from being a casual qualification, is one of the

determining properties. As to the *who*, it is evident that our innermost sense of personal

identity (and not only our overt public character) deeply reflects our implacement."[75] By

implacement, Casey means that in order to exist at all is to have a place.[76] From place

flow many of the things that identify us as individuals, and as members of a group.

Implacement is part of how a community develops a sense for itself. As Casey writes,

"We tend to identify ourselves by–and with–the places in which we reside."[77] Boundaries

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[73] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 34.

[74] I am using *habitus* in the same sense that Bourdieu (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*) uses the word; to describe a set of predispositions and inclinations that structure the way one understands and responds to the world. Bourdieu writes of *habitus*,

> The habitus is precisely this immanent law, *lex insita*, laid down in each agent by his earliest upbringing, which is the precondition not only for the co-ordination of practices but also for practices of co-ordination, since the corrections and adjustments the agents themselves consciously carry out presuppose their mastery of a common code and since undertakings of collective mobilization cannot succeed without a minimum of concordance between the habitus of the mobilizing agents (e.g. prophet, party leader, etc.) and the dispositions of those whose aspirations and world-view they express. (81)

[75] Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 307.

[76] Ibid., 13.

[77] Ibid., 120.

are established and maintained based on the observation of the conventions of a place, and as Ahmed observes, understanding and participating in the accepted conventions of a place enable one to competently move through space, secure in one's understanding of one's place in society.

Ahmed uses neighborhood watch groups as an example. When neighborhood watch groups come together, they reinforce the values of the community, and also establish "belonging" (owning property on the block, having a certain socio-economic status, etc.).[78] Therefore, the gathering of the neighborhood watch establishes *and* defends the social boundary, clearly identifying the "outsider" as someone who does not fit the profile of the community. An outsider will not conform to the ideals of the community (exhibiting strange behaviors, dress, or other characteristics that do not fit the characteristics of the community).

How bodies are touched also indicates whether or not they "belong" in a particular social space. The "strangeness" of a body has much to do with its proximity or distance to other bodies. When bodies move toward each other and away from each other, bodily space (and social space) changes.[79] Ahmed writes:

> For what is meant by the social body is *precisely the effect of being with some others over other others*. The social body is also an imaginary body that is created through the relations of touch between bodies recognizable as friendly and strange; who one allows near, who is further away, and so on. Bodies with skins, while they are already touched in the sense of being exposed to others, are touched differently by near and far others, and *it is this differentiation between others that constitutes the permeability of bodily boundaries*. The differentiated relation between 'this body' and 'other bodies', or between 'this' or 'that' other body, can other, in such a way that aligns some bodies with other bodies engendering the perpetual re-forming and deforming of both bodily and social space.[80]

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[78] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 27.
[79] Ibid., 49.
[80] Ibid.

In other words, there are no bodies except as they materialize in spatial and temporal relations to other bodies.[81] In order to differentiate between the familiar and the strange, we must define the inside and the outside of bodily space. This requires an analysis of body images and representations of bodily difference, as well as an analysis of the way in which bodily habits and gestures constitute bodily matter or form. Drawing on Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*,[82] Ahmed argues that this produces the *effect* of a boundary or fixity, when in fact the boundaries between bodies are as fluid as the relations that define their materiality. Therefore, it is in the process of welcoming or expelling a body that a body is recognized as a stranger and that the figure of the stranger is produced and the relationship between bodies is set.[83]

The skin is an obvious boundary line. On the one hand, the skin is a physical boundary that contains a subject within a particular shape, keeping blood, organs, and tissues inside the body. On the other hand, the skin is more than simply a boundary between the inside and outside of a body. It is a border that feels; it is the way in which human beings register touch and the way we physically experience another person.

Ahmed suggests that the skin is a boundary that registers the way in which bodies are materialized. For example, the refusal to touch a certain kind of body (a body with a particular skin tone, the body of a homeless person, a body deemed "infected" or somehow "dirty") changes the social space of both persons. It sets a certain social boundary that says, "someone like me cannot touch someone like you." The skin shapes this boundary because the threat posed by the body of the "other" is registered on the

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[81] Ibid., 40.

[82] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[83] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 4.

skin.[84] Constraining certain bodies to their bodily space is a way of containing a social space.

Strange bodies are often represented as incomplete, leaky bodies that threaten to contaminate or infect other bodies.[85] Strange bodies sometimes have open orifices, are malformed or are grotesque in some way. They threaten to slide and collide with other bodies, leaking into social space and contaminating everything they touch. The strange body is filthy, a pollutant. The representation of strange bodies as something threatening or contaminating reduces them to objects that need to be quarantined and prevents them from moving freely through a social space.[86]

In this process, the "stranger" is emptied of any content.[87] It is impossible to say with certainty that every loiterer is "suspicious," or that every oddly dressed teenager warrants a call to the police. Common sense dictates what one categorizes as suspicious. The stranger needs no formal definition because what is common to everyone in the group is already established by the formation and maintenance of the group. Anyone who does not fit the commonality should be regarded as suspicious. But, these "suspicious" people do not have any formal content (physical features, behaviors, etc.). Part of what makes strangers suspicious is that they are understood to have no legitimate function in the space they enter. They do not enter the exchanges of "capital" and they do not operate by the *habitus* of the space.[88]

The ideal community is like the ideally healthy body. It is "fully integrated, homogenous, and sealed: it is like a body that is fully contained by the skin. This implies

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[84] Ibid., 46.
[85] Ibid., 53.
[86] Ibid., 52.
[87] Ibid., 29.
[88] Ibid., 31.

that a good or healthy neighbourhood does not leak outside itself, and hence does not let outsiders (or foreign agents/viruses) in."[89] When communities do not appropriately regulate their boundaries and social spaces, the result is the "failure" of the community, according to Ahmed. A failed community is one where neighbors seem like strangers. With relaxed boundaries between those who are in-place and out-of-place, it becomes difficult to recognize strangers. Ahmed defines it this way, "A failed community is hence one which has weak or negative connections: where neighbours appear as if they are strangers to each other. The neighbour who is also a stranger–who only passes as a neighbour–is hence the danger that may always threaten the community from within."[90]

We see the phenomenon of the neighbor-made-stranger quite clearly in the story of Jephthah and his daughter (Judges 11). Jephthah vows to sacrifice the first person that meets him if he is victorious against the Ammonites. When his daughter is the first to greet the triumphant Jephthah, he recognizes her immediately, not because she is his daughter, but because she is out-of-place. She is not supposed to be the victim of his vow and her out-of-place presence exposes the priorities of the community. Which is more important: The reliability of Jephthah's word, or the life of his daughter? How will the community negotiate the out-of-placeness of Jephthah's daughter? In this moment, Jephthah's daughter becomes a stranger in her own home, recognizably out-of-place having come too close, exposing the baseness of the community, and ultimately murdered for her strangeness.

Every community has the potential to fail in this way. In fact, Ahmed asserts that sometimes it is not until a community has "failed" that it is recognized to exist at all. A

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[89] Ibid., 25.
[90] Ibid., 26.

community that has failed to shape a social space in which it is fairly clear who belongs has failed to develop appropriate boundaries for the constitution of the community.[91] However, it is also in the "failure" of a community that we begin to see what potential existed for the community, what the ideal community would have been. Ahmed writes, "it is only by attending to the trauma of neighbourhoods which fail that the ideal of the healthy neighbourhood can be maintained as possibilities (which is then, endlessly deferred as 'the real', as well as endlessly kept in place as 'the ideal', by that very language of crisis)."[92] Sometimes, it is only when a community enters into crisis that we can begin to see what made it function at all.

Three Thinkers in Productive Tension

On the one hand, these three thinkers exhibit several overlapping qualities. Each of the three is interested in the understanding how space and spatial relationships are changed by human mobility. For Casey, this is couched in the language of journey and finds a relatively positive expression in his descriptions of homecoming and homesteading. Cresswell's understanding of mobility is cast in more negative terms, as he describes the movement of people as deviant and a threat to the social fabric of a community. Ahmed's description of the stranger as someone out-of-place who has come too close and elicits a response is similar to what Cresswell describes as deviant behavior. However, Ahmed's work also emphasizes how the movement of people requires a (re)negotiation of communal borders and boundary maintenance, which comes close to Casey's ideas about cohabitation. All three utilize, to varying degrees, the idea of *habitus*,

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[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

or the notion that place deeply influences human behavior, and that out-of-place is often first identified by unacceptable or uncharacteristic behavior in a particular place. In this sense, all three also point to the importance of the body in understanding space. For example, Casey argues that our bodies are our main frame of reference for understanding space. Ahmed sees the very materialization of our bodies as dependent on relationship to other bodies. For both, a grasp of spatial language such as "inside" and "outside" is first understood in relationship to the body.

On the other hand, the three theorists exist in productive tension. First, each theorist approaches his or her analysis of space from a different disciplinary background. Casey is strongly phenomenological, which leads to his analysis of the human experience of space in transhistorical categories. In contrast, Cresswell brings a sociological framework, which forces him to contextualize his work. Indeed, Cresswell offers three case studies that illustrate his argument that "expectations about behavior in place are important components in the construction, maintenance, and evolution of ideological values."[93] Similarly, Ahmed's post-colonial perspective results in a contextualized study of space. As a result, both Ahmed and Cresswell examine communal responses to space, and relations of power, while Casey offers wide and sturdy categories and definitions that speak to human experience more broadly. Ahmed and Cresswell argue that "out-of-place" is communally defined before "place" can be understood. Casey takes the opposite approach: he argues for the primacy of place in identity development.

These tensions are productive for a reading of Judges as they allow us to telescope between the experience of space for the Israelite community, and the experience of space for individual leaders and judges. For example, Casey's work is especially useful for

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[93] Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place*, 4.

providing a framework to situate the book of Judges spatially. Casey's homesteading and homecoming definitions are a useful way to think about the (re)entry of Israel into the land, and his cohabitancy language is an apt way to capture the social negotiations between Israel and other occupants of the land which are the premise for the book of Judges.

The more contingent and contextual analyses of Ahmed and Cresswell help us to nuance the framework that Casey lays out as we focus in on the stories of individual judges and leaders. For example, Cresswell's work allows us to examine the liminal and transgressive character of Samson and the guest-status of the Levite. Similarly, Ahmed's post-colonial lens offers new ways to read the social dissolution into civil war in Judges 19-21. Both Cresswell and Ahmed offer us theoretical tools to analyze each unique story, while Casey provides an overarching framework for understanding the problems that drive the book.

In the chapters that follow, I make use of Casey, Cresswell, and Ahmed to draw out the impact space has on three Judges narratives: the story of Ehud, Samson, and the final story of the Levite and the woman. I use these stories as "soundings" with which to analyze the narrative spaces and demonstrate how an anxiety about space drives the text and the construction of Israelite identity in the text.

Chapter Three:

(De)Fragmenting Ehud's Story:
Identity Politics and the Ambiguity of Spatial Proximity in Judges 3:12-20

Casey, Cresswell, and Ahmed each articulate, albeit in different ways, the

relationality of space and place. Places come to identify us, molding essential pieces of

our personhood. We learn how to move through places based on how we relate to people

and objects in a place. Strangers are identified by their lack of awareness of the

customary ways of relating in a space. It is through spatial and temporal relations that we

have an awareness of ourselves at all, Ahmed argues. We learn to identify ourselves by

moving in, out, and through spaces, places, and relationships.

We see the relationality of space play out in Ehud's story of Judges 3:12-20. The

story sets up a simple problem: Moab, in alliance with the Ammonites and Amalekites,

has risen up against Israel, succeeding in taking possession of Jericho. The capture of

Jericho, the first city to fall to Joshua, is paramount to erasing Israel's claim to the land,

threatening an essential piece of Israelite identity related to their presence in the land. The

problem is obviously spatial: competing peoples occupy the same physical, geographic

space of the land. The problem is also social: the transgression of geographic boundaries

changes and challenges the shape of the Israelite community. Now a vassal state under

Moab, Israelite identity is at risk of being subsumed under Moabite empire.

Ehud, a left-handed Benjaminite, rises up as a deliverer for Israel and is quickly

elected to transport the tribute to King Eglon of Moab. Without the knowledge (or

permission) of the Israelites he represents, Ehud fashions a double-edged sword, which

he conceals under his clothes on his right thigh. He then presents the tribute to Eglon and

sends those who helped carry the tribute on their way without letting on what he has planned. Ehud turns back for Eglon's palace, and upon gaining entry to the palace declares before King Eglon that he has a "secret message from God" for the king. Eglon sends his servants and courtiers away so that he and Ehud may enjoy the privacy of his private chamber. In a climactic moment, Ehud reaches for his hidden sword and thrusts it into Eglon's belly. Ehud quietly leaves the chamber, locking the door behind him and escapes to Ephraim before the slain king is noticed. Upon arriving in the hills of Ephraim, Ehud summons the people to fight, leading the Israelites to the fords of the Jordan without taking the time to explain the situation. The Israelites prevail, killing "ten thousand of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men" (Judg 3:29), and succeed in subduing the Moabites.

On the surface, the story seems like a cut-and-dry tale of the underdog winning the showdown. It follows a predictable narrative curve, setting out a problem (Israel's bondage to Moab), building tension through the climax (Ehud's assassination of Eglon), and resolving the problem (the skirmish at the Jordan, ending in Israel's favor). It is a satirically funny story whereby Israel prevails over Moab and reasserts its control over its space and identity. However, foregrounding the spaces of the story allows a more complicated story to emerge, one in which Israelite identity is inextricably connected to the Moabites.

When we read across the spatial axis, the spaces of the story form a chiastic structure of concentric spaces with the bodies of the protagonist and antagonist at the center:

I. Ehud in Israel (Judges 3:15-16) – *Geographic Space*
    II. Ehud Enters Eglon's Palace (Judges 3:19-20) – *Built Space*
        III. Ehud and Eglon Alone Together (Judges 3:20-21) – *Body Space*
    II. Ehud Exits Eglon's Palace (Judges 3:23) – *Built Space*
I. Ehud Returns to Israel (Judges 3:26-30) – *Geographic Space*

We move from the widest, most general space (the land) to the narrowest, most specific space (the body) and back again. In the climactic moment of Judges 3:20-21, difference between Israelite and Moabite body spaces is marked indelibly on the body of Eglon with the thrust of Ehud's sword. Contrast this with the geographic space of the land, which must be shared by the Israelites and Moabites in both the opening and closing scenes of the story (geographic space is *not* clearly differentiated). Cohabitancy is an obvious problem in the story, as neither community has its own space. This is not a problem that finds an easy solution at the conclusion of the story. While Ehud's assassination of Eglon achieves the (relatively) short-term goal of dethroning the Moabites, it does little to reappropriate the space, and as we shall see, it does not allow Israel entire autonomy.

I begin at the center of the story with the comedic, if gory, assassination of Eglon and the intimate meeting of the bodies of the two men. Ironically, the narrative moment in which Israelite identity is reinscribed and differentiated from the Moabites is the same narrative moment when the two peoples collide and intermingle symbolically through their heroes.

Body Spaces: Ample and Impaired Bodies Meet

The murder of Eglon is intended to be an amusing, story with the Moabites the butt of the joke. Many scholars identify the story as satire, focusing on the characterization of Eglon. Barry Webb writes that the satirical quality of the story is its most striking feature, with the satire aimed squarely at King Eglon.[1] The grotesque and absurd are hallmarks of satire, and clearly at work in the depiction of the king, who is portrayed as a gluttonous, overweight, lazy ruler who meets his end on the chamber pot. This functions to make the satirist's audience feel superior to Eglon and the Moabites.[2] Marc Zvi Brettler agrees, arguing that if one misses the satire in Ehud's story, one is likely to misunderstand the whole tale and misinterpret its meaning. The story obviously does not present a straightforward history, writes Brettler, but exaggerates Eglon until he is larger than life.[3]

The body space of the characters is where the story is infused with comedic flare. The ethnic lines between King Eglon and Ehud are drawn when the (literally) larger-than-life king is brought to his knees. Eglon and his courtiers are painted as caricatures of a less intelligent, less observant ethnic class. Meanwhile, Ehud emerges as an unlikely hero: a hillbilly from Israel who assassinates the king with "one hand tied behind his back."[4] By the conclusion of the story, the Moabites are shown to be socially, politically, and ethnically inferior. The storyline is the stuff of spaghetti westerns.[5]

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[1] Barry Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 129.
[2] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 40.
[3] Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 88.
[4] Ehud is said to be "bound in the right-hand."
[5] Eric S. Christianson, "A Fistful of Shekels: Scrutinizing Ehud's Entertaining Violence (Judges 3:12-30)," *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 1 (2003): 53–78.

Consider the characterization of Eglon. His body is described with great detail.

The text reports that Eglon is "a very fat man," a statement supported by the

interpretations of decades of scholars. Robert Alter argues that Eglon's name suggests the

Hebrew word for "calf," which together with the epithet (*bārî'*) suggests that Eglon is

satirically portrayed as a sacrificial animal. Alter writes, "Eglon's fat is both the token of

his physical ponderousness, his vulnerability to Ehud's sudden blade, and the emblem of

his regal stupidity."[6] Meir Sternberg also sees Eglon's obesity as a main rhetorical feature

of the story. Ehud's sword is swallowed up inside Eglon's belly, which makes Eglon the

butt of no end of jokes:

> This Eglon, the macabre joke goes, will feed on anything. And if the concluding *va'yetse ha'parshedona* means 'the filth came out,' then it carries the situational realized wordplay to new lengths. It insinuates a network of rather obscene connections … between natural and figurative nourishment, upper and *middle* and lower mouth, eating and excreting.[7]

Eglon's rotundity also suggests that Eglon's policies have exacted a high degree

of the economic exploitation. Eglon has collected such an excess of taxes and tribute

from the Israelites, that he has literally become fat off the spoils, while Israel is limping

along with whatever leftovers are available.[8]

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[6] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 39.

[7] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 336.

[8] Lawson G. Stone, "Eglon's Belly and Ehud's Blade: a Reconsideration," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 4 (Wint 2009): 649–663. Stone proposes an alternative understanding of Eglon's body. He argues that the description of Eglon's body shape could be read as a way of describing him as a buff warrior. Stone argues that (*bārî'*) occurs only two other times in reference to human beings and neither instance connotes obesity. In Ps 73:4 and is translated as in the LXX, which translates as "firm, solid," which is the opposite of flabby and obese (651). The word is also used in Dan 1:15 to describe Daniel and his friends as healthy and nourished in spite of their austere diet. Further, the word for the fat (*ḥēleb*) that encloses Ehud's blade most often refers to the internal fat that covers the abdominal organs of slaughtered animals. When the word is used of humans (e.g. 1 Sam 1:22, Isa 34:6-7) it typically accentuates the carnage of the death (652). This leads Stone to conclude that, "the text does not present Eglon, king of Moab, as grossly fat or in any way impeded. The terms used typically denote health, strength, and attractiveness and constitute a portrayal of him as a formidable, healthy, robust man" (654).

By contrast, Ehud's body is described as "bound in the right hand." Several scholars have questioned this unusual detail. Lillian Klein says this makes Ehud an unlikely choice for a deliverer writing that, "left-handedness seems to have connotations of being peculiar and unnatural."[9] David Chalcraft concurs that left-handedness is unusual, writing that Ehud's right-hand "impediment" makes him deviant from the start since he is "physically abnormal," but argues that Ehud's left-handed "abnormality" takes on a heroic dimension with the murder of Eglon.[10] E. John Hamlin refers to Ehud simply as "handicapped in the right hand."[11] J. Alberto Soggin suggests that the possibility of Ehud having a real physical defect is supported by philology. He argues that the word *'iṭēr* (bound), is mostly used to indicate physical qualities or defects.[12] An impeded right

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If we take seriously Stone's reading of Eglon's body, Ehud and Eglon have contrasting bodies. Ehud has a weakened (perhaps deformed or handicapped) right hand while Eglon is a sleek, muscular, strong man. This helps explain why Ehud's presence in Eglon's inner chamber is never questioned – his disabled body is no physical threat at all to the brawny king. This is perhaps why Eglon shows no fear of Ehud and why his servants do not bother to frisk, search, or detain Ehud before he comes into the king's presence. They assume that even if Ehud had a weapon, his dexterity would be no match for their warrior-king. Reading Eglon's body as toned and stocky rather than obese also heightens the drama of the scene. Ehud's assassination plot is even riskier when he is alone with Eglon the hulk. This also makes Eglon's defeat all the more heroic and surprising. But, if Eglon is a sleek warrior, the story is no less humiliating or satirical: the well-prepared warrior has such a big head that a relatively simple assassination plot planned and executed by a one-handed fighter is all it takes to bring him down.

It almost does not matter if we read Eglon as fat or as sleek and buff because either depiction is not favorable in the end. If he is fat, then he is a greedy tyrant who eats the spoils while others starve. If he is trim and fit, then he is too self-confident, and perhaps even too stupid, to recognize a threat when it is literally right under his nose. In either case, the contrast of his good health at the expense of the wellbeing of the Israelites still pertains. Eglon is a clearly ridiculed figure.

[9] Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 37.

[10] David J. Chalcraft, "Deviance and Legitimate Action in the Book of Judges," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, ed. David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, and Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 183.

[11] E. John Hamlin, *At Risk in the Promised Land: A Commentary on the Book of Judges* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 73.

[12] J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1981), 50. Soggin indicates that some interpret this to mean "ambidextrous," which is indicated in the LXX (*amphoterodexion*) and the Vulgate. He points out that there are indications in other Hebrew Bible texts that the Benjaminites may be specially endowed with left-handedness, or ambidextrousness, but that "everything is in favour of a real physical defect, of a kind that would seriously diminish the capability of a fighting man and make him seem to be harmless. In fact, this is the only way in which we can explain how he could ever have been admitted into the presence of the king without any search or precautionary measure" (50).

hand would "seriously diminish the capability of a fighting man and make him seem to be harmless."[13] Perhaps his physical deformity (his "bound" right hand) makes him seem disarming, gaining him clearance to Eglon's most private quarters. How dangerous could a man with only one "good" hand be?

Part of the satire lies in the dramatic irony of Ehud's characterization. The reader knows that Ehud has the potential to be violently dangerous in spite of his physical deformity, as the narrator informs us that Ehud has made himself a two-edged dagger, which he conceals under his clothes. Every other character seems to have no idea that Ehud has concocted a secret plot or that he is armed. The humor lies in imagining the rotund king, too large to move quickly, so easily slaughtered in his private space.

The humiliating violence of Eglon's death alone (apart from the intimate encounter between the two characters) communicates clear ethnic difference. Eglon is portrayed as haughty, over-confident king who is so blinded by his own posh lifestyle (which comes at the expense of vassal kingdoms like Israel), that he cannot see an assassination threat until it is too late. His courtiers do not fair much better. While Ehud quietly murders Eglon, Eglon's courtiers wait outside assuming the two need privacy. In the meantime the king bleeds to death. The servants are no better equipped to identify Ehud as a threat than Eglon, and they are certainly not able to protect their king.

The "intentional transgression" of Ehud's actions also helps communicate difference between the Moabites and the Israelites in this scene. Ehud intentionally transgresses the borders and boundaries of Moabite space until he is in the most regal space of the land: Eglon's inner sanctum. Only after he transgresses one final boundary, the penetration of Eglon's body space, is the nature of his transgression fully disclosed.

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[13] Ibid.

He is no longer a harmless handicapped tribute deliverer, but a fierce and dangerous warrior. This final transgression, when Ehud is thoroughly out-of-place, changes the relationship between Moab and Israel from an empire/vassal relationship to a warring relationship between competing communities. True to Cresswell's maxim, out-of-place precedes in-place.[14] When Ehud is completely out-of-place do the boundaries (or the desire for boundaries) become more distinguishable.

Ehud's actions inside the palace reflect his status in this place. A guest and stranger to Eglon's court, Ehud's return after paying the tribute is explained by the need to relay a message to the king. Once he has gained access to Eglon, he announces, "I have a secret message for you, O king," to which Eglon silences his servants and sends them away so that he may receive Ehud's mysterious message in privacy. Ehud says again, "I have a secret message from God for you." Ehud has no obvious religious qualifications for delivering a divine oracle. Why should Eglon believe him? Could it be the way Ehud carries himself and the way in which he announces his "secret message" that gives him credibility? Is Ehud being coy? Ehud knows how to relay the message in such a way that his presence in the palace is given immediate legitimacy.

Geoffrey Miller sees sexual innuendo in this exchange between Ehud and Eglon. Miller argues that Ehud makes a sexual pass at Eglon, using the "secret message" as a pretense to get Eglon alone.[15] Miller reasons that it would not be prudent for Eglon to receive "secret messages" from foreign subjects alone unless he believed that what would transpire would be better received in private. Ehud plays on what he knows about the

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[14] Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 22.

[15] Geoffrey P. Miller, "Verbal Feud in the Hebrew Bible : Judges 3:12-30 and 19-21," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 55, no. 2 (Ap 1996): 115.

king: he is at the center of power and attention, he gets what he wants when he wants to get it, and if the king is feeling aroused, the king will make sure to satisfy his own desires. Ehud clearly understands the *habitus* of this space. He understands how to move, speak, and act in socially acceptable ways, which allows him access to the most intimate spaces.

Once his servants are excused, Eglon expects Ehud to come close for their intimate sexual encounter, which explains why he rises. Eglon was more sexually aroused than suspicious when Ehud reached into his clothes, toward his thigh. Given Ehud's right hand "impediment" and the king's own sexual arousal, a dagger is the last thing Eglon expects Ehud to take out from under his clothes. Miller asks his reader to imagine how the story would be performed, perhaps by an oral storyteller. He writes:

> The storyteller would have demonstrated graphically how Ehud reached between his legs with his left hand and began to remove his clothes; and how he pulled out *a pointed sword*, which he then proceeded to thrust into Eglon's obese belly so deep that not only the sword but also the hilt (i.e., testicles) disappeared inside and could not be removed.[16]

When Eglon's servants find the doors locked, they assume that Eglon is "covering his feet" in the coolness of his chamber. The feet are a common euphemism for genitalia in Hebrew, though the phrase has been interpreted by many scholars as meaning he was "moving his bowels." Miller suggests the phrase could easily be interpreted as slang for sexual intercourse: "To similar effect is the translation, based on different vocalization, that Eglon was 'pouring out his male member' in the cool room. This can be translated as 'urinating,' but might also have been slang for sexual activity."[17]

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

The thrust of Ehud's sword is not only sexual, but also feminizing, putting Eglon in a submissive sexual role. Susan Niditch points out that the term used for Ehud's belly (*beṭen*, Judges 3:22) is the same term used for womb, and that the image of the blade being thrust into Ehud's "womb" is "strongly vaginal."[18] The burly Eglon is not only murdered, but also penetrated and feminized by the left-handed underling, Ehud.

Ehud's actions completely exceed Moabite expectations of its subjects. His physical abilities exceed expectations for a physically challenged body. Ehud redraws the boundaries between Israel and Moab, by physically marking Eglon's body. With the thrust of his phallus, Ehud dominates the dominator, reducing him to a quarantined pollutant percolating blood and filth all over his posh inner chamber.[19] This feminizing estrangement of the king of Moab communicates Israelite cunning and strength in contrast to Moabite sloth and carnal desire.

Eglon's palace is no longer a place of reverence and safety for the king of Moab, but a crime scene and a symbolic graveyard. When Ehud murders Eglon, he allows Moabite space to fold in on itself. I turn now to consider how Ehud's transgression of the palatial space reinforces Cresswell's thesis that space informs our expectations about behavior. Ehud's presence in the palace constitutes a "tactic," which subverts Moabite power and reasserts Israelite identity.

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[18] Susan Niditch, *Judges* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 58. See also, Mieke Bal who draws parallels between Ehud and Jael, suggesting that both commit similarly feminizing crimes. Mieke Bal, *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 35.

[19] Ahmed observes that strange bodies are often represented as contaminating objects in need of containment, which prevents them from moving through social space and contaminating other bodies. This seems to be represented in a very literal way in Eglon's situation. Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 52.

Built Space: The Concentric Spaces of Eglon's Palace

The structure of Eglon's palace is revealed subtly in the thresholds Ehud crosses into Eglon's court. In order to enter into Eglon's inner sanctum, Ehud must cross at least four boundaries, navigating the hierarchy of Moabite society at each turn. First, Ehud must turn aside at the *pesîlîm* (the "monoliths") at Gilgal into Moabite territory. Then, Ehud must enter into the labyrinthine multi-chambered palatial structure. Drawing on Baruch Halpern's suggestion that contemporary *bit hilani* Assyrian and Syrian palaces can serve as a model for Eglon's palace, we can assume that such buildings had three main structures: first, an antechamber, then a central hall, and finally a private inner chamber.[20] Judges 3 does not mention the antechamber directly. It must be inferred as the space to which the servants are banished and must wait while Eglon and Ehud have their private encounter. The central hall is easily identified as the interior, but social space, into which Ehud enters and announces his secret message, with courtiers and servants milling about. The private inner chamber is even more obvious, as the space into which King Eglon invites Ehud, and from which all the servants are dismissed.

Gregory Mobley imagines these as concentric spaces, calling them "nesting boxes" of narrative and social space. The *pesîlîm* (sculptured stones), which have corresponding references in Judg 3:19 and 3:26, are spatial markers of Ehud's move into enemy territory and back into Israelite territory. Narratively, Mobley sees the mention of *pesîlîm* as an articulation of the dramatic core of the story. The story then moves almost instantaneously to Eglon's central hall. This is articulated verbally by the parallel use of the words "to exit" (*yāṣā'*) and "to enter" (*bô'*) in Judg 3:19b-20a ("All [Eglon's]

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[20] Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 1996), 46–60.

attendants *exited* from his presence. Ehud *entered*") and Judg 3:24 ("After [Ehud] *exited* and the servants *entered*").[21] Here, Ehud announces that he has a "secret message" for Eglon, news that causes Eglon to silence everyone in the central hall and admonish his attendants to wait in the antechamber. There is an even smaller, more intimate space: Eglon's private inner chamber. Again, Ehud enters (*bô'*, vs. 20) and exits (*yāṣā'*, vs. 24) this space so that at the most critical narrative moment, we find Eglon and Ehud locked into the most architecturally private space.[22]

In the narrative description of King Eglon's palace, we can easily see that the Moabites have built a palatial structure that reflects their political needs as a society, but this palatial structure has in turn shaped the people who inhabit it. We see how the palatial structure shapes *habitus* plainly in the description of Eglon's behavior. His location, at the center of the palatial structure, is analogous to his central position in Moabite society. This makes his speech pattern, particularly his use of imperatives, predictable as the commanding figure in this place. Likewise, the quick obedience of his servants and their movement to the periphery is also predictable, as they have a subordinate role to Eglon. Their hesitancy to reenter Eglon's inner chamber without permission is intelligible to us as readers precisely because we know that their proper place is on the periphery, and persons on the periphery do not make self-initiated bodily movements. They move as the king commands them. The structure of the palace reflects the layers of hierarchy in Moabite society, suggesting a highly structured, tiered society that revolves around the king. As the central, highest ranking figure, the king makes the most decisions, inevitably effecting other people. Members of subsequent tiers of the

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[21] Gregory Mobley, *The Empty Men: The Heroic Tradition of Ancient Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 91.
[22] Ibid.

society have only as much agency as they have proximity (both social and physical) to the king.

Ehud uses the space to his advantage. It is quite possible that his "bound right hand" gives him entry into the palatial structure that is denied to others, simply because he seems, at first sight, to be very little physical threat. More than just using his bodily space and posture to his advantage, Ehud seems to know what to say and do to get the desired response. Whether he is offering King Eglon sexual favors or his "secret message" is understood more literally as a divine oracle, Ehud understands Moabite social hierarchy and the construction of Moabite space well enough to know how to get a private meeting with the king. He anticipates that a "secret message from God" will force the king to excuse himself to his private chamber to receive such "news." In the cloak of privacy, Ehud assassinates the king, but is socially savvy enough to know that Eglon's courtiers, who wait to the point of embarrassment to open the door, will respect the locked chamber. This ensures that Eglon will bleed to death before help arrives, and gives Ehud a chance to escape and summon the Israelites to fight.

Ehud's actions constitute an intentional transgression, as he crosses into Moabite territory intending to mount a resistance to Moabite oppression. However, his actions are also tactical, in the sense that de Certeau uses the term. He defines tactics as "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. …It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse."[23] Tactics are a sort of trickery, usually employed by the socially weak, in

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[23] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 37.

which ordinary every day circumstances are manipulated. Ehud's actions are tactical in the sense that he engages Eglon's every day spaces in ways that appear outwardly acceptable, but actually undermine the social systems that support them. For example, when Ehud murders Eglon in his inner sanctum, he transforms the king's private space, a space reserved specifically for the office of the king, into a symbolic grave. The space is changed because the social structure (kingship) that supports it is weakened.

The outward signs of Eglon's physical and political superiority become the very things that lead to his death. His palace is built so that he can be the centerpiece, putting his chamber at the center of a series of nested spaces, so that he can occupy the most protected, honored place in his kingdom. The palace, and even Eglon's kingship, become a box from which he cannot escape. The structures that construct Eglon's identity seal his death.[24]

Are Israelite spaces also impacted by Ehud's actions? We might assume that they are, since Ehud's assassination of Eglon brings on war and war often results in the loss or damage of built structures. However, the text is not clear about what impact (positive or negative) this has on Israelite spaces because in contrast to the detail with which the Moabite palace is described, Israelite built spaces are not mentioned. Ehud simply summons the Israelites with a trumpet blast from the hills of Ephraim. This is not a terribly organized group of people. There is no central administrative center or standing army.

A close examination of the geographic spaces of the text further complicates matters. As the analysis below demonstrates, the division of the geographic land space is ambiguous in the story.

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[24] Mobley, *The Empty Men*, 93.

Geographic Spaces: The Ambiguity of Place

The story starts out with a clear geographic problem: the Moabites have invaded Israel's space. On the most basic geographic level, it would seem that Israel is successful at solving this problem since they "seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites, and allowed no one to cross over" (Judges 3:28). However, this assumes that the Jordan River is a meaningful boundary between Israel and Moab. Closer consideration for the geographic location of the places mentioned in the story shows the geographic boundaries between the two peoples to be rather obscure.

Most scholars agree that the "city of palms" can be identified as Jericho. The defeat of Jericho by the Moabites is damning for Israelite claim to the land, since Jericho was the first city won by Joshua. The ensuing vassal relationship with Moab establishes a cohabitancy expectation, to invoke Casey's language. Israel still lives in the land, but must now pay tribute to Moab. This is hardly a situation of equipoise. It is quite likely that this represents an economically precarious circumstance for Israel, one in which they are dominated by Moab and forced to pay such high taxes that there is little left to support themselves.

The capture of Jericho together with the ensuing vassal relationship to Moab suggests a symbolic expunging of Israel from the land. Israel is erased from the land insofar as her relationship to the space is altered. Israel no longer has the freedom of autonomy to make economic or political choices in the land. The vassal relationship demarcates difference between Moab and Israel, keeping Israel clearly separate from Moab. However, this social separation also subjugates Israel to Moabite authority so that Israelite identity in the land is dependent on Moabites.

The twice mentioned "sculpted stones" seem to mark some kind of boundary between Moab and Israel. Twice Ehud crosses past the "sculpted stones" near Gilgal: once when he crosses into Moabite territory (just before he murders Eglon; Judges 3:19), and again when he crosses back into Israelite territory (after which he summons the Israelites to war; Judges 3:26). When Ehud travels past the "sculpted stones" the first time, he moves into Moabite territory, as the very next statement has him speaking directly to Eglon. Conversely, when Ehud travels past the same "sculpted stones" the second time, he is clearly in Israel as his next action is to summon the Israelites to war. Gilgal is seemingly located near the banks of the Jordan, where the skirmish with the Moabites takes place. At the conclusion of the story, the Israelites have "seized the fords of the Jordan" (Judges 3:28) and "Moab was subdued" (Judges 3:30).

The remainder of the story's geography is ambiguous. Where is the precise location of Gilgal? Is it east or west of the Jordan? Where is Eglon's palace? Is it in Moab proper? Or has Eglon relocated it to "the city of palms" west of the Jordan? Where are the territorial boundaries being defended and re-established? What effect should they have?

There is a good deal of uncertainty among scholars about the precise location of Gilgal. The chief geographic ambiguity revolves around which side of the Jordan Gilgal is located. The building of the altar at Gilgal is reported in Joshua 22:10-11. The altar is reportedly built at Geliloth-of-the-Jordan, in the land of Canaan (Josh 22:10). Josh 22:11 goes on to say that the altar was built "to the front of (*'el-mûl*) the land of Canaan. The phrase that follows makes it challenging to know what is precisely meant, since it reads *'al-'ēber bᵉnê yiśrā'ēl*. The difficulty is with the word *'ēber*, which often means "across,

on the other side." Is the altar on the west bank or east bank of the Jordan? N.H. Snaith

writes that the difficulty has been solved in a variety of ways:

> Some have omitted the phrase 'which is in the land of Canaan' as a gloss. This
> omission places the altar fairly and squarely on the west bank of the river (or does
> it?). The Vulgate just did not know where the altar was. It was *in terra Chanaan*,
> but then has *super Iordanis tumulos contra filios Israhel*, which the Douai
> Version translates "on the land of Chanaan, upon the banks of the Jordan, over
> against the children of Israel." The Jerusalem Bible has "facing the land of
> Canaan, near the circles of stones at the Jordan, beyond the territory of the
> Israelites." The phrase "beyond the territory" means the east bank of the river, but
> at the same time the *tumuli* of the Vulgate are identified with the twelve stones of
> Josh. Iv 1-8, which were on the west bank.[25]

Ultimately, Snaith concludes that the altar at Gilgal was on the west bank of the

Jordan, arguing that it had cultic significance for the east-Jordan tribes, sharing

prominence with places like Bethel (the shrine of the North) before the Deuteronomic

reforms.[26]

If in fact this is the same altar that Ehud passes by on his way to and from Eglon's

palace, on which side of the Jordan is the altar? Is it possible that the entire story takes

place on the west side of the Jordan? The problem is compounded if we try to pinpoint

the location of Eglon's palace. Judges 3:13 indicates that the Moabites, in alliance with

the Ammonites and Amalekites, took possession of the "city of palms," which is usually

interpreted as Jericho. Although Eglon's palace is mentioned in the subsequent narrative

(Judges 3:20), there is no mention of where the palace is located. Some scholars have

assumed that the palace was located at Jericho, since from a strategic standpoint Jericho

lies between two focal points (Jerusalem and Amman).[27] Moreover, Jericho sits at the

beginning of several main roads connecting to the Jordan Valley and the central hill

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[25] Norman H. Snaith, "The Altar at Gilgal: Joshua Xxii 23-29," *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (1978): 331.

[26] Ibid., 335.

[27] For example, see John Raymond Bartlett, *Jericho* (Guildford: Lutterworth Press, 1983), 24–25.

country, making it a strategic military outpost for guarding the passes to these major

cities and perhaps collecting taxes from travelers.[28] For these reasons, Jericho might be

an attractive place for Eglon's palace. However, if we imagine the palace in Jericho and

understand Gilgal to be on the west side of the Jordan, the geography of the story is

confusing. Seizing the fords of the Jordan would refer to controlling access to the west

side of the Jordan.

This would mean that Ehud never leaves the west side of the Jordan, and would

locate Eglon and his palace on the west side of the Jordan. It would also mean that

"seizing the fords of the Jordan" is simply a reference to not allowing entrance or exit at

Gilgal, essentially trapping the Moabites on the west bank of the Jordan. If this is the

case, the Jordan is not the geographic boundary we might have imagined. By this reading,

the Moabites and Israelites were living together in the land before the story started, and

continue to live together in the land (though with fewer armed Moabite men in their

number).

More complex still, what of the Israelites living on the east side of the Jordan?

David Jobling considers three "fords of the Jordan" incidents in Judges (Judg 3:27-29;

7:24-8:3; 12:1-6). In the first two of these incidents, the judge works in alliance with

Ephraim (west of the Jordan) and summons Ephraim to battle at the Jordan. In the third

instance, Jephthah is antagonistic to Ephraim and fails to summon Ephraim to war. In the

first story, Ehud is a member of the tribe of Benjamin (on the west side of the Jordan),

while Gideon is a member of the tribe of Manasseh (the only tribe that spans both sides

of the Jordan), and Jephthah is from Gilead on the east side of the Jordan. In each of the

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[28] Richard Hess, "The Jericho and Ai of the Book of Joshua," in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, ed. Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 36.

instances, it seems the Ephraimites are on the "right" side of things. They see themselves as clear Israelite "insiders" (a view the narrator likely shares). In Jobling's reading, the Ephraimites stand for those living on the west side of the Jordan. Therefore, non-Israelites are "outsiders" and they live on the east side of the Jordan. What should we make of the Gileadites, who are geographically outside of Israel (on the east side of the Jordan), but belong to Israel and should be regarded as insiders? Jobling calls them "non-inside." Of course, the prospect of non-insiders means that there is an equal prospect of non-outsiders: those who live on the west side of the Jordan, but are *not* Israelites. This, Jobling argues, is part of the deep, structural problematic of the book.[29] Considering Jobling's analysis, could Ehud's seizure of the fords of the Jordan have also kept Israelites *out*? The Jordan River is not the simple geographic marker between insider/outsider, Israelite/Moab that a superficial reading of the story would suggest.

It seems that both Israel and Moab have little choice but to live in very close proximity to each other. Establishing separate geographic spaces for each community may be impossible, or at least impractical. If clear geographic boundaries cannot be established between the two communities, the boundaries must be social. If Casey's analysis is correct that identity is inextricably linked to the places we inhabit, it stands to reason that, if the Israelite and Moabite communities are inhabiting the same space, they will come to adopt similar identities. Of course, this does not mean that establishing separate and distinct identities for each community is impossible, only that such clear boundaries will require a great deal of boundary maintenance.

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[29] David Jobling, "Structuralist Criticism: The Text's World of Meaning," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 110.

We see aspects of this problem in Ehud's story already. Ehud is able to adopt a *habitus* appropriate to Eglon's palace so that he can maneuver through the space without alarming anyone. Eighteen years is certainly enough time to observe Moabite *habitus* and adapt and adopt some key cultural features (like language, speech patterns and affect). Certainly, one strategy for gaining entry into Moabite regal space would be to present yourself as *one of them*, and masquerade as no threat at all.

Whereas the colliding of Ehud and Eglon's bodies at the center of the story mark difference between the bodies of the two men, and by extension their respective peoples, the geographic spaces of the story are more ambiguous. Ehud's sword marks the ethnic differences of Eglon's body: Eglon (and Moab) is humiliated, feminized, and duped – a lesser ethnic class. But these differences are not so clear in the lived, geographic spaces of the story. Israelites and Moabites are not just neighbors; they live among each other.

At the conclusion of the story, there are no Israelite-only spaces, there are only shared spaces. Israel is defined against the Moabites as "non-Moabite." Israel's identity and existence depends on their relationship with Moab. Space is relational and finding one's identity in space requires relationships with other people(s). Apart from a relationship with other peoples, there can be no Israel.[30] However, any relationship with another people (whether an exploitative or cooperative relationship) will change the way Israel identifies itself. There is no easy way to inhabit a space without risking change or "losing" one's identity (or gaining a new identity).

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[30] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 47.

Final Considerations: Space, Empire, and Identity Construction

Every group of people must carefully balance internal threats and external social threats in order to create clear, meaningful, and enforceable social and physical boundaries. One way groups do this is by defining themselves against another group. Cresswell acknowledges this with his statement "that although 'out of place' is logically secondary to 'in place,' it may come first existentially."[31] In other words, sometimes it is only in relation to the Other that it is possible to identify oneself. Ahmed comes to a similar conclusion when she argues that sometimes communities must "fail" to construct appropriate boundaries in order to know what constituted the community at all.[32]

In Ehud's story, it is only by contrast to the Moabites that we are able to identify the Israelites. The story gives almost no detail about the Israelite community that is not contrasted with the Moabite community. The ethnic humor in the story indicates what the Israelites find objectionable about the Moabites, offering some clue (by inference) as to what they wish to avoid for their own community. The story makes the Moabites seem wholly inept, indulgent, and over-confident, setting up a dichotomy between the Moabites and the Israelites. The Israelites are defined in negation to the Moabites, as that which the Moabites *are not*. Moabites are dense (Israelites are the clever tricksters). Moabites are cocksure (Israelites are more dangerous than they appear). Moabites are dependent on their political and social structure (Israelites come together and fight when necessary, when there are no other options). We are given little indication of what coheres the Israelites as a group apart from their contrast to the Moabites. A transgression

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[31] Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place*, 22.
[32] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 25.

into Moabite territory is required before we can identify Israel. As Cresswell predicts, out-of-place precedes in-place.

The story also makes it clear that there are few alternatives to the Moabites and Israelites living among each other. Sharing the land space is inevitable, and cohabitation is necessary. Cohabitation requires equipoise, but at what cost? We might be tempted to see the final sentence of the story as an expression of equipoise ("The land had rest for eighty years" Judg 3:30). However, if we can assume that "rest" means the cessation of violence (at the very least), this does not guarantee equipoise. It may simply indicate that no one dared to challenge the *doxa*. The failure to define the Israelites in any concrete way makes shared power seem dubious. Finally, what is at stake if a more balanced social life between the Israelites and Moabites is achieved? If the Israelites and Moabites reach a balance of power in their shared space, will their unique communal identities be lost?

One of the functions of narrative is to negotiate precisely these tensions. Philosopher David Carr argues that communities are formed through a delicate balance of mutual acknowledgement of what the group holds in common and also stand in opposition to other groups, whose threat may have occasioned the mutual recognition of the group.[33] According to Carr, communities require a tension between internal and external opposition, and agreement on some common narrative, in order to survive. Carr writes,

> Insofar as there is unspoken agreement on all sides that members address each other *as* members of a community there must be some sense of a common story, at least as regards the past. Nevertheless, disagreement may even arise over how to interpret the past. …These can be rival versions of the same story, but they can

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[33] David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 159.

also be the basis for factions so sharply divided that they threaten the unified existence of the community from which they sprung.[34]

Stephen Cornell also affirms the importance of narrative in establishing communal and ethnic boundaries. At the heart of every ethnic identity, Says Cornell, is a narrative that attempts to tell a story about who "we" are and who "they" are and why. Cornell argues that identity often takes a narrative form, and that narrative lies at the heart of many ethnic identities. Furthermore, narrative forms of ethnic identity become more salient during periods of rupture, when identities are called into question, or tested by situations or events, causing the identity to lose its taken-for-granted quality, and often resulting in a change in the narrative form of the identity.[35] Finally, identity narratives are almost always bound up in power relations. The same identity may have various narratives attached to it, some composed by insiders who narrate their own identity, and some by outsiders narrating the identity of others. The version of the story that gets told in public forums is the one that gains currency, giving its creator power to define the group. It does not matter if the story is "true," what matters is the degree to which those who tell it find it to say something essential about the group in question.[36]

Ehud's story seems to be struggling to arrive at some kind of identity narrative. It desperately wants to show that Israel and Moab are different, that Israel is superior to Moab. However, the story also seems to need Moab in order to differentiate Israel. As Ahmed articulates, there are no bodies except in relation to other bodies. Does this story allow us to identify Israel apart from Moab? It seems that some relationship with Moab is

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[34] Ibid., 158.
[35] Stephen Cornell, "That's the Story of Our Life," in *We Are a People: Narrative and Multiplicity in Constructing Ethnic Identity*, ed. Paul R. Spickard and W. Jeffrey Burroughs (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 42.
[36] Ibid., 47.

necessary, but the story is trying to set the parameters for such a relationship. The arrangement of the text in concentric, chiastic rings of space narratively illustrates the tension between needing to differentiate Israel from Moab (e.g. Ehud "marking" Eglon's body) and finding a way to live with the reality that the land space must be shared.

Reading Ehud's tale as a relatively cut-and-dry hero tale in which the oppressed Israel comes out on top and Moab is forced to skulk back into its own territory is one way to read the story. This kind of story certainly has its appeal as it overturns hierarchies and puts Israel in the victor's seat. Moreover, the use of humor to make the point, with the characterization, plot, and setting all working in concert to make a satirical gesture, is entertaining. However, careful look at the spaces in the story offer another, more complicated possibility. Rather than clearly subverting Moabite authority and reclaiming Israelite space and identity, the story may be subtly expressing the tension between carving out an identity that is separate from empire and yet still living in proximity to the Other and to some degree depending on the Other for a sense of self.

Chapter Four:

The Fluidity of Space and Identity in Samson's Story:
Spatial Liminality and Transgression in Judges 13-16

Samson's story is one of the most well known tales from the Bible. His story has

popular appeal for the many of the same reasons as other famous folktale legends: he is

an unusually strong man with a gregarious air. A nazirite from conception, Samson is

known for his unshorn hair, his unpredictable ways, and his forays with the Philistines.

Early in his story, he marries a Timnite (Philistine) woman, protects a Timnite vineyard

from a ferocious lion, and challenges the Timnite men to a wedding feast riddle. His

brute strength is both an asset and a liability. He is bold and outgoing – the life of the

party.

However, as his novella unfolds, he is also a threat to settled, city life. He sets

fire to the Philistine farmland, his own Israelite people are afraid of the turmoil he will

bring at Lehi, and Gazites hatch a plan to oust him from their city. He is both friend and

foe. Delilah, an agent of the Philistines, finally subdues Samson in a well-known scene

where Samson's hair is cut and his strength is sapped. Samson's eyes are gauged out and

he is relegated to a lifetime of service grinding at the mill. However, Samson's story

does not end here. His hair grows back and with it comes his strength. When the blind

Samson is lead to the Philistine temple to entertain the feasting Philistines, he uses the

opportunity to topple the temple in one last show of strength, pushing the pillars apart

and sealing his fate and that of the Philistines in attendance.

Samson's story is rife with spaces and places. He moves in and through

vineyards and fields, cities and temples, remote caves and mills. Samson's relationship

to space stands in contrast to Ehud. Ehud seems especially aware of the boundary (or the need for a boundary) between Moabite and Israelite spaces. His venture into Moabite space is targeted and swift. He crosses into Moabite territory only to return and defend Israelite social and geographic space. Even if Ehud's judgeship does not result in clearly delineated Moabite and Israelite spaces, he does manage to rally Israel to fight Moab. Ehud's tale unifies the people.

By contrast, Samson is a hapless "hero" who moves in and out of Philistine space, lingering at times. His lack of (more or less) permanent place is reflected in his liminal lifestyle (or is it the other way around?). He develops relationships with Philistines (e.g., his marriage to a Philistine woman). Unlike Ehud, Samson's movement in and out of foreign geographic space is not swift or well planned, and he lacks the cunning graceful navigation of built spaces that Ehud exhibits: Samson destroys built structures (e.g., the gate at Gaza, Dagon's temple).

More than his brawn or erratic volatility, Samson's constant motion is his biggest threat. Places help us define people. Mobility is a form of chaos that challenges those boundaries and borders that order space. When people do not stay in a place, it becomes increasingly difficult to define and characterize them because mobility disrupts any sense of implacement, which in turn disrupts a sense of identity. "Where something or someone is, far from being a casual qualification," Casey writes, "is one of its determining properties. As to the *who*, it is evident that our innermost sense of personal identity (and not only our overt public character) deeply reflects our implacement."[1]

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[1] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 307.

The more Samson moves physically between places, in and through Philistine and Israelite territory, the less easily we can identify him in the story. He illustrates Casey's point that implacement is tantamount to well-being, and he proves Cresswell's point that mobility is a form of super-deviance. As a result, Samson's story also does not have the unifying impulse of Ehud's story. It is difficult to rally around a character that cannot be easily defined.

Samson's transgression of social, bodily, and ethnic boundaries is directly related to his transgression of geographic and built spaces. I argue that Samson's mobility makes it exceedingly difficult to identify him, which in turn makes it difficult to know how (or whether) the community claims him or spurns him. The narrative itself resists easy classification. The fluidity of borders and boundaries, both in the story-world and the narrative frame of the text itself, obscure the emergence of a common Israelite identity.[2] Analysis of the boundaries between human and animal, male and female, and Israelite and Philistine that Samson transgresses pushes the reader to (re)consider what constitutes the Israelite community.

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[2] Samson's liminality has already been clearly articulated by other scholars. I am not interested in rehearsing those arguments, rather I will take Samson's liminality for granted as I examine how his transgression of body, built, and geographic spaces challenges the assumed order of society and offers an alternative leadership style, response to Empire, and communal identity construction than that offered by Ehud's tale. For discussions on Samson's liminality, see: Gregory Mobley, "The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116, no. 2 (June 1, 1997): 217–233; Gregory Mobley, *The Empty Men: The Heroic Tradition of Ancient Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 2005); Gregory Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2006); Steven Weitzman, "The Samson Story as Border Fiction," *Biblical Interpretation* 10, no. 2 (January 1, 2002): 158–174; Susan Niditch, "Samson As Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 624; Stephen Wilson, "Samson the Man-Child: Failing to Come of Age in the Deuteronomistic History," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 1 (April 1, 2014): 43–60.

Samson's Transgression of Human/Animal Boundaries

In the ways Samson engages bodily, built, and geographic spaces, he repeatedly crosses the boundary between human and animal. His animal-like tendencies are not just transgressive, but downright deviant and threatening to human communities, both the Philistine community and the Israelite community that Samson is supposed to defend. This transgression moves him toward the margin, if not outside the human community altogether.

Gregory Mobley is perhaps the best-known proponent for the position that Samson's character cannot be understood apart from "wild man" motifs, a motif which explains his animalistic traits. Stock characters of international folklore traditions, popular in medieval literature, and in mythic structures of the ancient Near East, wild men are typically described as hairy creatures and are "size-shifters:" they can be abnormally large, or dwarfed.[3] Wild men avoid human contact and live in uninhabited regions that are usually inaccessible. Depicted as a fairly primitive creature, the wild man uses crude weapons (or no weapons at all), may crawl on all fours, and has uncontrollable, unpredictable behavior. He may be perpetually aggressive, or exhibit irrepressible lust. The quintessential wild man does not talk (a true *barbaros*, or "babbler"), and does not (cannot) worship the gods, and for these reasons exists outside the respected norms of society. Sometimes the wild man is insane.[4]

The wild man's situation is not always permanent. A woman may lure a wild man back into culture, where he begins to adapt and adopt more acceptable human

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[3] Mobley, "The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," 218.
[4] Ibid.

characteristics.[5] In medieval literature, it is a short leap from an acculturated wild man to a heroic knight. When his fury, strength, and passion are harnessed for good, a wild man can become a ferocious warrior and "monster-tamer." But, a failed romance or unsuccessful battle may be enough for a wild man to revert to his previously feral state. The boundary between wild man and hero is blurred and fluid.[6]

Wild men of Mesopotamian tradition share several of these qualities. Enkidu of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, for example, exhibits virtually all of the qualities of a wild man.[7] Enkidu's story starts in the wilderness, where he is raised by his mother (a gazelle) and his father (a wild donkey). He is covered with hair and leads an overtly animalistic life, which is indicated in his story by his appearance, diet, and habitat. Like other wild men, Enkidu is humanized by Shamhat (a woman) and led into the city. Once opposed to the city, he eventually becomes its defender. Mobley writes that, "Enkidu represents the rural barbarian who assimilates to Mesopotamian urban life," but at the same time he is "(1) the monster who threatens or interferes with urban culture, (2) the rural barbarian, and (3) the unfinished remnant of early humanity."[8]

The *laḥmu*, a figure of Mesopotamian art, also portrays the wild man. The *laḥmu* is depicted as naked and bearded, with unshorn hair parted in the middle with three plaits on each side. The *laḥmu* is often shown in contests against animals, either unarmed or using primitive tools as weapons. Like the fluid relationship between the medieval wild man and heroic knight, the *laḥmu,* notes Mobley, "has an ambivalent status: while the textual referents indicate a demonic or monstrous classification (e.g., the *laḥmu* is often

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[5] Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East*, 108.
[6] Mobley, "The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," 219.
[7] Ibid., 220.
[8] Ibid., 222.

paired with the *kusarikku*, the bull-man), his physical features are wholly human, that is, heroic. Is the *laḥmu* then *homo sapiens* or *homo ferus*?"[9]

Samson exhibits some of the characteristics of a wild man.[10] Although we receive little information about his physical appearance, we are told (and reminded) that Samson has untamed, unshorn hair. Although the narrative never explicitly says that Samson is unusually large, he is depicted as quite strong, which has naturally led to him being rendered visually as a hulk. Unlike other heroes of Judges (i.e. Ehud), Samson wields no weapon, or occasionally a primitive weapon. He uses his bare hands to wrestle the lion (Judg 14:5-9). He kills a thousand Philistines using only the jawbone of a donkey (Judg 15:14-15). Fire is his weapon of choice when he turns 300 torch-laden foxes loose on the Philistines. When he fills with rage, Samson is uncontrollably violent (Judg 14:19-20). He also exhibits irrepressible libido. In the four chapters of his story, he sexually pursues three different women.[11]

Spatially, Samson also mimics the figure of the wild man. He often retreats to uninhabited places. After burning up the Philistine's fields, Samson finds shelter in a rocky crag (Judg 15:8). Samson also consistently opposes settled, city life. For example, when he is threatened in Gaza (Judges 16), he rises in the middle of the night and uproots the doors of the city gate and carries them to Hebron. By removing the city gate, Samson removes one of the most crucial barriers between the city and the wilderness,

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[9] Ibid., 224.

[10] Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East*, 16–19. Mobley is not the first to notice that Samson fits a "wild man" paradigm. See also: Hermann Gunkel, "Simson," in *Reden und Aufsätze* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1913), 38–64; James L. Crenshaw, *Samson: A Secret Betrayal, a Vow Ignored* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978); David E. Bynum, "Samson as a Biblical Phēr Oreskōos," in *Text and Tradition* (Atlanta: Scholars Pr, 1990), 57–73; Niditch, "Samson As Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit."

[11] Mobley, "The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," 229; Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East*, 19–25.

leaving the city exposed to wild animals and enemy attacks during the most vulnerable nighttime hours. Moreover, when Samson enters cities, things always take a turn for the worst. When he enters Timnah, he loses the wager on the riddle, loses his wife, and causes major destruction to the Philistine food supply (making cultivated land "wild").

Like other wild men, a woman tames Samson. When he is alone with Delilah in the valley of Sorek, his secrets are coaxed out of him; he is subdued, and handed over to the Philistine enemy. Samson also has lunatic-like qualities. Although the text does not tell us that Samson is crazed, the "spirit of the Lord" rushes upon him on at least four occasions. The spirit of the Lord also descended upon Saul (1 Samuel 18:10), causing him to have erratic behavior. While Samson's actions may not rise to the same level of lunacy characterized by Saul, certainly the spirit of the Lord seems to enhance his ferocious nature.

In other ways, Samson is definitely not a wild man. He does not crawl on all fours. He speaks rather eloquently. He employs the use of complicated riddles, demonstrating a robust understanding of how to use language.[12] Finally, we know that Samson is no foreigner to religion. He is a nazirite from birth, a specialized lay status that mimics the priesthood and indicates that he has a close relationship with the deity. Moreover, he prays to God twice (Judg 15:18; 16:28).[13]

Mobley's study draws out the ways in which Samson is a composite figure, certainly drawing on more than one tradition and more than one character motif. Samson shares much in common with Enkidu and *laḫmu*, which adds to the argument that he is

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[12] Niditch writes, "Samson creates riddles and displays wit; he possesses the quintessentially human capacity to shape reality through the medium of speech." Niditch, "Samson As Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit," 613.

[13] Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East*, 22.

modeled after other wild man figures. Mobley finds the clearest connections between Samson and the *laḥmu*, especially with the peculiar detail in Judg 16:13-14 that Samson wore his hair in seven locks (harkening back to the *laḥmu's* six locks). But, Samson is also comparable to Enkidu, in that both prefer natural environments and are hairy. Despite the fact that he does not manifest all of the characteristics of a wild man, Mobley concludes that Samson cannot be understood apart from this motif.[14]

At certain times and places, Samson's unpredictability and animality is sanctioned and welcomed. For example, when Samson tears a lion limb-from-limb in the vineyards of Timnah, his use of brute force was likely a protection for the vineyard and those working in it. Here, Samson's animalistic tendencies are used to benefit the Philistines, possibly endearing him to the Philistines prior to his marriage to the Timnite woman. At other times, Samson's ferocity and fervor are not welcome. When he releasing three hundred foxes with torches on the Philistine vineyards, grain fields, and olive groves, even Samson is self-aware that this is "mischief" (Judg 15:3). His actions devastate valuable Philistine food resources and return the cultivated space to the wild. This time Samson's show of strength makes him a clear foe of Philistia. The way in which Samson engages space changes how we identify him (as helpful vs. menace).

The reader begins to get the idea that Samson belongs in the wilderness. Not only does he seem more comfortable in the wilderness (seeking refuge in the rocky crag of Etam in Judg 15:8, for example), but it also seems that Samson's unpredictable behavior, brawny strength, and uncontrollable sexual appetites are not welcome inside civilization. For example in Judges 16, when Samson sleeps with a prostitute in Gaza, the Gazites are clear that they must find a way to oust Samson from their community ("So they circled

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[14] Mobley, "The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," 231.

around and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They kept quiet all night, thinking, 'Let us wait until the light of the morning; then we will kill him.'" Judg 16:2). Samson is again pushed to the margins of society when the Philistines seize him at the end of his saga. After they gouge his eyes out, the Philistines shackle Samson and relegate him to grinding in the mill–a task done either by women or animals. Even the subdued Samson is not welcome inside cultured society, but is forced to live in confinement.

Not only does Samson oppose settled, civilized lifestyles, but he actually *destroys* the built places that make them possible. In addition to his destruction of Philistine grain fields and his uprooting of Gaza's gates, Samson's final act of destruction is perhaps the most notorious: the toppling of Dagon's temple. Samson's presence in a populated, cultured place almost always brings some form of destruction to a built structure. He is the proverbial "bull in a china shop."

Samson's transgression of human norms puts him outside the human community. But, these same traits also fuel Samson's heroic nature. There is dis-ease with allowing Samson inside civilized human space, but there is a similar anxiety about cutting ties with such a fearless, fearsome fighter who uses his lunacy to protect and defend the Israelite community. On the issue of Samson's transgression of human/animal boundaries, and his overt display of wild man tendencies, the text seems ambivalent. As Niditch writes of Samson:

> He is a bridge between what humans have transformed, neatened, shaped, institutionalized, and socialized and what is found in nature, wild and nonsocial. He moves between both worlds, but his source of strength, his unusual and emphasized qualities are in the realm of the raw, the wild, the natural, and the

nonsocial.[15]

Samson's bodily materialization, and engagement of space do not abide by the (un)written rules of human society and this is confirmed for the reader by the reaction of those holding the dominant ideology. Cresswell observes, "Ideologies are 'action-oriented' beliefs – ideas that promote some actions while discouraging others."[16] Samson challenges a basic ideology that holds human community together: that humans behave differently than animals. This estranges him from human civilization, making him an outsider even among his own species (to say nothing of his own people). As Cresswell notes, "An outsider is not just someone literally from another location but someone who is existentially removed from the milieu of 'our' place – someone who doesn't know the rules."[17]

Even though Samson is easily identifiable and recognizable (he is scarcely the kind of character we could *miss*), he is a stranger in his own story. Samson's transgression of human/animal boundaries situates his body space and his geography and also situates him socially. The inability to contain Samson in human habitations and his erratic behavior make him incompatible with human social space. We recognize Samson because we want to ensure our distance from him. What does it say that Israel's warrior-hero-judge, trusted with defending the Israelite community, is expelled from the community? Or, that he is more animal than human? Wild man traits are also often the type of subhuman traits that are attributed to people who are geographically or chronologically remote. A spatially remote wild man is often portrayed as representative

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[15] Niditch, "Samson As Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit," 613.

[16] Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 155.

[17] Ibid., 154.

of a monstrous ethnically or racially "other" people.[18] What kind of community nurtures

and raises up a "subhuman" hero? What qualities of that community does Samson

defend?

The examination of Samson's transgression of human/animal boundaries

demonstrates how his physical mobility between cultured/wild, and

populated/unpopulated places impacts the way we identify his character. If Samson's

transgression of the human/animal boundaries has us questioning his adequacy as a

representative of the Israelite community, or the identity and nature of the community he

represents, the feminization of the hyper-masculine "hero" adds to the confusion.

Samson's body space, in particular the way it is altered and mutilated, further

complicates his identification. It also complicates the identification of the Israelite

community, which Samson represents.

Samson's Transgression of Male/Female Boundaries

The feminization of Samson has been widely recognized by a number of scholars

and commentators because of his general subduing, but especially the feminizing

overtones of the shearing of Samson's hair in Judges 16.[19] But, Samson's character is

subtly feminized in several other scenes throughout the Judges 13-16 narrative, in spite

of his hyper-masculine characterization as a wild man. It is only in his final action

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[18] Mobley, "The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," 219. For example, in Genesis Esau is depicted as a hairy man who is a skillful hunter and generally a man of the outdoors, while Jacob is depicted as a more mild man who typically stays indoors, inside the confines of the camp. Esau is shown to have less culture, and is easily duped into selling his birth right for a bowl of stew, a less than complimentary portrait of the man from whom the Edomites are descended (See Gen 25:27-34).

[19] For example: Mieke Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993); Ela Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska, "Samson: Masculinity Lost (and Regained?)," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 171–188.

(toppling the Philistine temple) that Samson manages to reestablish his masculinity.

Samson is a mobile, unpredictable, and threatening character. Feminizing him is a way

of stripping him of his male honor and privilege, and making him more controllable.

Whereas Samson's responses to certain situations (such as the burning of Philistine

fields) were a consequence of his own decision making power, his feminization

(particularly the mutilation of his body in Judges 16) is something forced upon him, as a

way of putting Samson in his place.

Consider the riddle Samson asks the Philistine men at the wedding banquet in

Judges 14. Samson's riddle ("Out of the eater came something to eat / Out of the strong

came something sweet" Judg 14:14, NRSV) is a challenge to the masculinity of the

Philistine wedding companions. The answer to Samson's riddle is a riff on "love"

(whatever other sexual meanings it might connote),[20] and it becomes a way in which

Samson asserts his sexual knowledge over the other male guests who cannot crack the

riddle.[21] When the Philistine men struggle to provide the answer to the riddle, Samson is

shown to be more masculine because his sexual knowledge surpasses that of the

Philistine men. But, when the men solve the riddle (with the help of Samson's bride),

Samson's masculinity is challenged twice over. Not only have the Philistines solved the

riddle, showing themselves to have equal sexual knowledge as Samson, but also they pry

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[20] Claudia V Camp and Carole R. Fontaine, "The Words of the Wise and Their Riddles," in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, ed. Susan Niditch (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 141–142. Camp and Fontaine give several possibilities for the riddle's meaning. If the "strong eater" is the groom, then perhaps the "something sweet" could be semen. Or, if the "strong eater" is the woman, then "something sweet" might be her lubricating fluids, which the groom might consume during oral sex, or perhaps the milk her breasts will ultimately produce as a result of their sex act. Crenshaw also suggests that the riddle suggests sex, also suggesting that the "eater" and "strong one" are suggestive of the groom and "food" and "sweetness" relating to semen. Cf. James L. Crenshaw, "Samson Saga : Filial Devotion or Erotic Attachment?," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 86, no. 4 (January 1, 1974): 490; Crenshaw, *Samson*, 115.

[21] Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 43. Bal suggests that riddles in myths and fairy tales are connected to sexual maturity.

the solution from Samson's wife. Samson's male honor is challenged once because the men solve the riddle, but again because his bride betrays him, which demonstrates that Samson has no control over his woman.[22]

Samson responds violently to the situation in an effort to restore his honor. He goes down to Ashkelon and kills thirty men and takes their festal garments in order to deliver on the wager attached to the riddle. He returns back to his home in Israel for a time, only to come back to Timnah and find that his wife was given to his best man–yet another blow to his male honor. The father of the Timnite woman offers her younger sister, who he claims is prettier than her older sister, but accepting the younger sister would symbolize Samson's acceptance of his weakened position.[23] Samson again responds violently, this time burning up all of the Philistine shocks, standing grain, vineyards, and olive groves in an attempt to regain his masculinity. The Philistines respond by burning the father and the Timnite bride. With this, the Philistines avenge their loss of crops, and also show disrespect to Samson. Not only was Samson unable to control his wife in the riddle scene, but also he was unable to save her life at the hands of her own people.

There are other displays of Samson's virility and masculinity in the story. For example, Samson's escaping from the bonds at Lehi is a show of his virile energy. Pulling up the gates at Gaza after sex with the prostitute is another demonstration of Samson's masculinity, especially since sex does not seem to sap his strength, even

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[22] One way male honor was established in the ancient world was demonstrating control over the women in one's control. Therefore, when Samson's bride betrays him and gives away his secret to the Philistine men, his male honor is denigrated. For more detailed information about honor-shame cultures, see Ken Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject-Honor, Object-Shame?," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 67 (1995): 87–107; Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska, "Samson: Masculinity Lost (and Regained?)."

[23] Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska, "Samson: Masculinity Lost (and Regained?)," 175.

temporarily. However, the most obvious sign of Samson's masculine vitality, strength, power, and sexual potency is his hair.[24] This makes the cutting of his hair an even more potent symbolic unmanning than Samson's previous encounters with the Philistines.[25] Mieke Bal writes of the haircutting scene, "Haircutting, especially in this context, can hardly be denied some affinity with castration."[26] Exum describes the story of Samson and Delilah as expressing male fear of surrendering to a woman.[27] She, too, assumes that Samson is symbolically castrated when his hair is cut: "Women rob men of their strength. The man who surrenders is emasculated; he loses his potency. At another level, this is the male fear of losing the penis to the woman, an anxiety that finds representation in Samson's symbolic castration that takes place when his hair is cut and he is blinded."[28] Others have suggested that the removal of Samson's eyes is a symbolic representation of cutting off his testicles, both being round, soft tissue.[29]

The scene with Delilah is perhaps the most feminizing moment for Samson. He is in an undeniably compromised position, asleep on Delilah's lap (or, as some have read it, between her knees),[30] a thinly veiled reference to sexual intercourse. Delilah exploits Samson's vulnerability and uses the opportunity to cut his hair, which violates his

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[24] Susan Niditch, "Defining and Controlling Others Within: Hair, Identity, and the Nazirite Vow in a Second Temple Context," in *The "Other" in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*, ed. Daniel C. Harlow et al. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 83. Niditch writes that 8th century reliefs from Lachish show male Israelite warriors with shoulder-length hair.

[25] Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska, "Samson: Masculinity Lost (and Regained?)."

[26] Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 226.

[27] J. Cheryl Exum, "The Theological Dimension of the Samson Saga," *Vetus Testamentum* 33 (1983): 83.

[28] Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 83.

[29] Bal (*Death & Dissymmetry*, 226) references Freudian theory that associates blinding with castration. Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska ("Samson: Masculinity Lost (and Regained?)," 180) associates Samson's eyes with testicles.

[30] While the MT suggests Samson was asleep *on* Delilah's knees, the LXX suggest that he was asleep *between* her knees. As Danna Fewell and David Gunn write, this may point to a tension between maternal and sexual imagery. Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, "Controlling Perspectives : Women, Men, and the Authority of Violence in Judges 4-5," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58, no. 3 (1990): 394.

nazirite vow and saps his herculean strength. In this moment, Samson is humiliated and feminized. Citing Ken Stone, Ela Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska notes that when a man allows (or is powerless to prevent) himself to be acted upon sexually, he is feminized.[31] She goes on to say:

> It is, then, possible that behind the text's ambiguity there is a suggestion of yet another stage of Samson's emasculation: that he is not only defeated and humiliated, but also sexually subdued like a woman, through actual intercourse, or at least through forcible exposure of genitalia.[32]

If cutting his hair and gouging out his eyes were not humiliating enough, the Philistines also bind Samson with bronze shackles and force him to grind at the mill. "Grinding" ($\sqrt{t\bar{a}han}$) is used as a sexual *double entendre*. Citing both Job 31:10 and Isa 47:2-3, Niditch points out that "grinding" is a euphemism for sexual intercourse.[33] Moreover, grinding at the mill is women's work. Even within the book of Judges, the mill is associated with women: Abimelech is killed by a woman who throws an upper millstone on his head (Judg 9:53). After the humiliation of the physical alteration and mutilation of his body space, Samson's feminization is taken further by forcing him to do the work of a woman in women's space. In this way, "he is not only 'like a woman', but like a *sexually subdued* woman."[34]

Many scholars see in Samson's final act, the toppling of the Philistine's temple, a reclamation of his masculinity after symbolically becoming woman. Bal sees the temple as a symbolic uterus, with Samson standing at the vaginal opening. When he pushes the temple pillars apart, Samson collapses the temple and symbolically kills the feminine.

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[31] Ken Stone, *Sex, Honor, and Power in the Deuteronomistic History* (Continuum, 1996), 76.

[32] Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska, "Samson: Masculinity Lost (and Regained?)," 180.

[33] Susan Niditch, *Judges* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 171; Cf. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 70.

[34] Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska, "Samson: Masculinity Lost (and Regained?)," 179.

Bal writes that Samson "has found a better solution to the birth trauma than anybody else. He takes revenge, breaking the thighs and killing the impure Philistines with it. He outdoes woman, making the gap acceptably large. Not only does he kill the woman and with her, her people; he makes her superfluous, too."[35]

Of course, Samson's final act kills not only the feminine, but also himself. Recovering and reaffirming his masculinity is more important than preserving his own life. Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska writes that the rules of honor dictate that unless the dishonored individual takes revenge, he does not exist for others. Therefore, although Samson ultimately loses his life with this final act of revenge, his masculinity is restored and he is (posthumously) readmitted into male society.[36] Exum also takes this symbolic destruction of woman to mean that Samson is reincorporated into male sectors of Israelite society, reclaiming his masculinity. Exum points to the retrieval and burial of Samson's body as affirmation of his life and valuing of his masculinity.[37]

Samson's body transgresses male/female gender boundaries when his hair is forcibly cut, and his eyes are gouged out. But more than this, Samson is relegated to women's spaces (the mill) and women's work (grinding). Samson exists in a liminal space between male and female gender spaces, straddling the boundary, so that he is simultaneously male and female. Meanwhile, Delilah takes on a masculine role, becoming a shrewd warrior-like character. At the end of the story, Delilah, a woman, is the hero for the Philistines while Samson, a man, is grinding at the mill. Both characters cross gender boundaries. Typical male and female roles are exchanged and interchanged, blurring the boundary between male and female. Delilah, a foreign woman, emerges as

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[35] Bal, *Lethal Love*, 62.
[36] Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska, "Samson: Masculinity Lost (and Regained?)," 182.
[37] Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 85.

more masculine than the most masculine of Israelite men. This is a damaging portrayal of Israelite ethnicity. Is Samson the kind of "hero" we were hoping for at the outset of the story?

Feminizing Samson functions to literally put him in his place by physically restraining him and tethering him to "women's work." Shackling Samson puts an end to his mobility, which, as we have seen, is a substantial threat as Samson disrupts the established order of things. Samson has altered several important Philistine places. Samson has made Philistine farmland a wasteland and he has made the city of Gaza easily penetrable. The mutilation of Samson's body forces a feminized bodily representation upon him. Feminizing and fettering Samson demonstrates that the Philistines are in control of the meaning of their places and they will no longer allow Samson to freely foul up their space. As Cresswell writes, "favored meanings for places are defended and made explicit (taken out of the realm of the assumed) at moments of crisis when transgressions threaten to change a place's meaning, and thus the place itself, from 'our' place to 'their' place."[38]

Although the feminization of Samson seems to be almost entirely the work of the Philistines, the Israelites seem fairly passive and complicit about it. After all, the Judahites do not hesitate to turn Samson over to the Philistines at Lehi, and there is no Israelite voice of protest when Samson is finally captured and imprisoned by the Philistines. Samson was no less threatening to Israelite spaces and social order than he was to the Philistines. His impulsive and violent temperament threatened the welfare of the entire community in Judah. Putting Samson in his place benefits the Israelites as much as it does the Philistines. The Israelites seem content to "play the woman" in

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[38] Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place*, 137.

relation to the dominant Philistines. In that sense, it is not just Samson that is feminized, but the whole Israelite community.

The transgression of gender boundaries in Judges 13-16 calls into question the significance of the boundary in the first place. One function of feminizing Samson is to shame him and bring down his reputation as a strong man.[39] But, not every female is lowly or subordinate. Delilah is rewarded (and perhaps celebrated) for her role as a woman. Being a woman can be a positive quality: maleness and femaleness are slippery in this story.[40] If Samson can so easily be feminized, was his maleness an important feature of his judgeship? If Delilah can so easily dupe Samson and subdue him for the Philistines, would a woman have been a better choice for a judge? If men can successfully perform female roles and women can successfully perform male roles, why separate the roles? The way in which Samson's story upsets the boundary between male and female calls into question the gendering of society into designated male/female spaces and roles.

Places help us define people. We have already seen how the physical mobility of Samson constitutes a threat to both Israelite and Philistine places. Samson's breech of physical boundaries (geography, buildings) and social boundaries (human/animal) leads to an impulse to permanently restrain him by mutilating his body and socially and

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[39] There may be a third option, one that avoids clearly pinning Samson as masculine or feminine: is he a perpetual child? Stephen M. Wilson ("Samson the Man-Child," 43–60.) argues that Samson simply fails to grow up, pointing to his lack of children and unmarried status, his impetuousness, his strong connection to his parents, and his lack of solidarity with other adult men as evidence.

[40] Lori Rowlett ("Violent Femmes and S/M: Queering Samson and Delilah," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ken Stone [Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001], 107) makes a similar observation. She notes that the earliest musical renditions of Samson and Delilah's story were written in the era of male castrati, which already queers gender lines. Later performances have a similar "gender bending" quality. She writes that Saint-Saëns' Dalia is "already full of hyperbolic female characteristics, like a drag performance" (107). She concludes that "When the biblical Samson and Delilah story is read through the lens of its literary and musical performance history, we end up with a butch bottom and a dominatrix femme of either indeterminate gender or gender so over determined as to verge on the camp sensibility of gender impersonation" (109).

sexually subduing him. How does all of this impact Samson's original purpose to begin to deliver Israel from Philistia (Judg 13:5)? Does he destine Israel to a submissive (feminized) role?

Samson's mobility does more than just upset the balance of geographic and built spaces. It challenges the very definition of "Israel" and "Philistia" by altering the proximity between the two peoples. I turn now to explore how Samson challenges the ethnic boundaries between Israel and Philistia.

Samson's Transgression of Israelite/Philistine Boundaries

Several scholars have argued that Samson's story attempts to forge a boundary between the Israelites and the Philistines. Steve Weitzman refers to the story as "border fiction," arguing that Samson's riddle is a way of creating a boundary between Israel and Philistia by showing the Philistines to be intellectually incapable of explaining the riddle without help. Niditch writes that the major theme of Samson's story is "the marginal's confrontation with oppressive authority, more specifically Israel's dealings with its Philistine enemies."[41] Frank Moore Cross and Lawrence Stager have both referred to Samson's story as a "border epic."[42] That Samson crosses a line between Israelite and Philistine is not at all disputed. How does Samson transgress the boundary between the Israelites and Philistines? How do the physical and geographical boundary crossings call the ethnic distinctions between Israelites and Philistines into question?

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[41] Niditch, "Samson As Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit," 624.

[42] Lawrence E. Stager and Paula Claire Wapnish, *Ashkelon Discovered: From Canaanites and Philistines to Romans and Moslems* (Biblical Archaeological Society, 1991), 18. Stager cites Cross's reference to Samson's story as a "border epic."

Crossing the geographic boundary between Israel and Philistia is part of the pulse of Samson's narrative. Mobley notes that a key structural feature of Samson's story is the repetition of verbs of ascent ($\sqrt{}$ *ʻālāh*) and descent ($\sqrt{}$*yārad*). Mobley observes that sixteen times in Judges 13-16 a character is said to go up or come down, sometimes bringing another character up or down, each time using a form of either $\sqrt{}$*ʻālāh* or $\sqrt{}$*yārad*.[43] Mobley also notices that the use of the verbs of ascent or descent follow the topography of the story: Samson goes down from the Shephelah region to Philistia and the Philistines go up from Philistia to the Shephelah, which makes good, geographical sense. These details are important, writes Mobley, because "[e]very time a character goes up or goes down, important boundaries are crossed: the boundaries between Dan and Philistia; between "cut," *mûl*, and "foreskinned," *ʻārēl*; between highlanders and lowlanders."[44] Samson is not simply crossing topographic boundaries, but also economic and cultural boundaries as well when he travels between Dan in the Shephelah region and Philistia in the coastal plains.[45] Although the ascending and descending of characters in Judges 13-16 does not correspond precisely with the unfolding of the plot, it does set a pattern and expectation for the chain of events like a rhythmic downbeat.[46]

Though the story sets his home in the Shephelah region, Samson never stays in any place long enough for us to understand a single dwelling to be Samson's "home." Certainly the Philistines would find some discomfort with Samson's mobility, since he is

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[43] Mobley, *The Empty Men*, 184.

[44] Ibid., 185.

[45] See: Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, "Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I: Archaeology Preserves What Is Remembered and What Is Forgotten in Israel's History," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 3 (October 1, 2003): 413; Israel Finkelstein, "The Philistines in the Bible: A Late-Monarchic Perspective," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27 (2002): 156. Both Bloch-Smith and Finkelstein demonstrate that differences between Philistine and Israelite culture are evident archaeologically whereas Israelite and Canaanite culture is much more difficult to separate materially.

[46] Mobley, *The Empty Men*, 185.

constantly moving in and out of their territory. This kind of movement in and out of

Philistine territory calls into question the very idea of there being a clearly designated

"land of the Philistines," to say nothing of an autonomous "land of Israel." Neither is this

a wholly comfortable situation for the Israelites, whose warrior is constantly moving

around causing trouble in other lands. The more mobile Samson is, the less obvious are

the boundaries that mark Israelite territory.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that both the Israelites and the Philistines respond to

Samson by literally tying him down. The Israelites bind Samson in Judg 15:12-13 so that

they can hand him over to the Philistines. In this scene, the Israelites are obviously

concerned for their well-being as a community because the Philistines have encamped in

Judah and raided Lehi. Samson's vagrant lifestyle has caused the Philistines to seek

Samson in the land of Judah. The boundary between Philistia and Israel is porous. In

Judg 16:21-22 the Philistines chain Samson down, gouging out his eyes as extra

insurance that his mobility will be limited.[47] To be sure, Samson's mobility is a serious

threat to both the Philistine and Israelite communities.

Cresswell notes that mobility is a form of "superdeviance" that goes beyond

simply "out-of-place," but threatens the whole organization and fabric of a society. The

tidy division of space into orderly units is an easy way to organize space. Mobility

disturbs this basic division of space, causing chaos and confusion. Samson's mobility

causes him to trespass all kinds of borders and boundaries–not just geographic

boundaries–but also social boundaries (e.g. marrying a Philistine). The compulsion to

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[47] Cresswell (*In Place/Out of Place*) argues that sight helps us to differentiate between things and provides us with a spatially structured universe. He writes, "Sight is our most important sense, and it is used to distinguish spatially and direct us through the complicated and dangerous world of everyday life" (154).

physically restrain him is one felt by the Philistines when they finally capture Samson, but also a motif throughout Samson's tale. His own people tie him up at Lehi and most of his encounter with Delilah involves forms of binding.

More narrative time is spent in Philistia than in Israel, and most of Samson's interpersonal relationships are with Philistines, not Israelites. He attempts to marry a Timnite woman (Judges 14).[48] He sleeps with a prostitute in Gaza (Judges 15), and he falls in love with Delilah (Judges 16), who is never identified as a Philistine, though she has connections to the Philistines and is persuaded to work Samson over in their favor. On the surface of the narrative, it seems that Samson is slowly becoming Philistine as he is more socially invested in the Philistine community than the Israelite community.

In fact, Samson has little contact with the Israelite community. The only interactions Samson has with the Israelite community are exchanges with his parents and the scene in the rocky crag at Etam (Judg 15:9-13). This is hardly a scene of wild public support for Samson, but neither is it a scene of abject abandonment. The Judahites promise only to bind Samson and not to cause him any harm themselves. Surely the Judahites must have been aware of Samson's unusual strength and had at least a sliver of optimism that Samson would find a way out of this literal bind. Nonetheless, this scene represents the most sustained contact Samson has with members of the Israelite community, and it is a scene in which his own people willfully hand him over to the Philistines. Samson's most enduring (for better or worse) and most significant relationships are in the Philistine community.

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[48] It is never clear that Samson actually marries the Timnite woman. Though he clearly thinks of himself as her husband in Judges 15, her father obviously thinks the marriage is defunct since he gives her in marriage to Samson's companion.

Samson's ethnic identity comes into question with each subsequent transgression of the geographical boundaries between Israel and Philistia, but even as he physically moves between geographic spaces, his body space serves as an outward manifestation of his Israelite identity. His hair is an obvious ethnic marker.[49] Niditch writes that Samson's hair is part of the negotiation of complex social relations between the Israelites and their Philistine neighbors. In ancient Near Eastern art, the Philistine men are portrayed as clean-shaven while Israelite and Canaanite men are portrayed with shoulder-length hair.[50]

The other physical marker of Samson's Israelite identity is his circumcision. While it is clear from Judges 13-16 that the Israelites considered the Philistines to be uncircumcised (see especially Judg 14:3; 15:18), Niditch notes that there is no extrabiblical evidence concerning this physical difference between the two people.[51] Moreover, circumcision is not a physical trait that can be easily observed by outward appearance. "Hair," writes Niditch, "thus becomes an important way in which the Israelite author reflects upon Israelite identity and culturally demarcates his people from the uncircumcised Other."[52]

The cutting of Samson's hair is therefore quite significant. Not only is it a form of symbolic castration and emasculation, but also it is one way in which the Philistines

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[49] Additionally, Gaster (*Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament: A Comparative Study* [New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969], 437) writes that the belief that strength resides in hair is a widespread belief. He cites stories from all over the world that indicate the cutting or shaving of body hair as a form of punishment or even torture. See also: Susan Niditch, *My Brother Esau is a Hairy Man: Hair and Identity in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 66.

[50] Niditch, *My Brother Esau is a Hairy Man*, 68.

[51] Ibid., 70. Niditch cites the Great Karnak inscription of pharaoh Merneptah as referring to some Sea Peoples as circumcised. However, she also notes that Lawrence Stager (1998) thinks that Samson's story may reflect a true Iron Age I situation where the Israelites were geographic neighbors with both Semitic (circumcised) and early Greek (uncircumcised) peoples.

[52] Ibid., 69.

assert their dominance over Samson. To care for or cut someone's hair is a demonstration of power over that person. Cutting one's hair changes one's identity and outward appearance.[53] Samson's shorn hair removes the physical ethnic marker that signals his Israelite status. It makes him, against his will, more Philistine-like. Niditch writes, "Philistines are portrayed as trying to rid themselves of the hero's hairiness and thereby to assert that their own culture is dominant."[54] Of course, the story does not end with Samson's cropped hair. His hair grows back, and with it comes his strength. "The Israelite response," Niditch writes, "through the story as related, implicitly is, 'You are too stupid even to notice or worry when the powerful, symbolically loaded hair grows back.'"[55] Samson's body space is an outward manifestation of his Israelite identity that makes his boundary crossing into Philistia a clear transgression. If it were not for his hair, which is a clear give-away to his Israelite identity and nazirite status, Samson might not be so obviously out-of-place in Philistine territory. The reader might even be persuaded that Samson has become a Philistine, given his proclivity for Philistine women and the sheer amount of time he spends in Philistia, but his hair is clearly a crucial part of his identity as a *nazir*, an Israelite, and a hero, preventing him from becoming wholly Philistine.

In spite of the outward, bodily markers of Samson's ethnicity, the story teeters perilously on the edge of becoming a Philistine story. Susan Ackerman argues that Samson's story might make more sense imagined as written by a Philistine. She focuses on the climactic story of Samson and Delilah in Judges 16. Here, Samson is hardly heroic as Delilah tells him outright that she wants to know the secret of his strength, and

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[53] Ibid., 67.
[54] Ibid., 69.
[55] Ibid., 70.

seems clear about her intention to hand Samson over to the Philistines. He falsely

divulges his secret to her three times, and each time she shamelessly calls the Philistines

to take custody of the weakened warrior. Samson is hardly very shrewd in this scene.

Ackerman calls him a "witless lout."[56] This type of story would resonate with a

Philistine audience, who would likely cheer as the praised Israelite hero was outwitted

by a woman.

Although commentators through the ages have viewed Delilah as a temptress,

Ackerman argues that if we consider the story from a Philistine point of view, she

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[56] Susan Ackerman, "What If Judges Had Been Written by a Philistine?," *Biblical Interpretation* 8 (2000): 35. Some scholars want to redeem Samson as a fairly sophisticated man. For example, Bruce Herzberg ("Samson's Moment of Truth," *Biblical Interpretation* 18, no. 3 [January 1, 2010]: 226–250) argues that Samson was not tricked into getting his hair cut (an interpretation that assumes that Samson is dull, dumb character who does not understand Delilah's motives). Rather, Herzberg argues that Samson is testing the waters – seeing how this magical strength really worked. This argument takes advantage of the fact that the text does not indicate precisely where Samson's strength comes from. By this logic, Samson was just as curious as Delilah was about the origin of his strength. Therefore, although he tells her that his strength depends on his nazirite status, not even Samson knows if this is the truth. He uses this as a test to determine exactly where his extraordinary powers come from. The reading assumes that Samson is an introspective character. Herzberg's reading also assumes that the story's own explanation (that Samson was literally nagged to death by Delilah) is inadequate.

Similarly, Jeremy Schipper ("What Was Samson Thinking in Judges 16,17 and 16,20?," *Biblica* 92 [2011]: 60–69) argues that Samson does not succumb to stupidity when he shares the secret of his strength. Rather, Schipper argues that Samson overestimates the situation entirely. The spirit of the Lord, which descends on Samson several times throughout the tale, was causing Samson insomnia, writes Schipper. Samson may well have been eager to allow his strength to wane in order to get some sleep. Therefore, the first three attempts by Delilah to solicit Samson's secret were Samson's way of testing her loyalty. Schipper argues that especially with the third attempt, there seemed to be no imminent Philistine threat, that this was all some kind of coy trick. So, Samson felt it was safe to assume that Delilah was trustworthy and the Philistines were no threat at all when he gave her the true secret to his strength. Moreover, since the previous restraints were no hindrance at all, Samson probably assumed that cutting his hair would require no more strength than simply sweeping the shorn hair away. By this logic, Samson was not stupid, but perhaps overconfident. As interesting as these two readings are, they seem to perform exegetical gymnastics to save Samson's character from his own behavior. Even if Samson did not know the source of his strength, and even if he was motivated by peaceful sleep, it is hard to dismiss the fact that Samson gives his secret away to a foreign woman, with whom he was in love, for very little return.

Ackerman's argument, by contrast to these two arguments, does not try to save Samson's character, but foregrounds the (relatively) forgotten Delilah as a hero. This shifts the paradigm so that the story is not primarily about Samson's demise, but about Delilah's rise. Tammi Schneider (*Judges* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 224) also observes similarities between Delilah and Jael, as does O'Connor before her. However, well before either Schneider, O'Connor ("The Women in the Book of Judges," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 [January 1, 1986]: 277–293), or Ackerman, John Milton (*Samson Agonistes* [London: Macmillan, 1890]) suggested the similarity between the two, in Delilah's parting speech in which she imagines that songs will be sung of her at festivals, just as Israel includes Jael in its "Song of Deborah" (Judges 5).

becomes a hero. In this scene Delilah (not Samson) becomes the protagonist. She likens Delilah to Jael, the heroine of Judges 4-5.[57] Both women act apart from men and use their seductive powers to lure, and ultimately murder, dangerous men in their midst.[58] Ackerman writes, "Were we, however, to imagine ourselves as the Philistines' cultural heirs, it might be the 'Song of Delilah' instead–or at least a celebration of the hero Delilah incorporated into some larger 'Song'–that would have come down to us as a hymn of praise."

If we take Ackerman's argument seriously, the whole story becomes Philistine-focused and Philistine-centered so that the main protagonist is a heroine in support of the Philistines (if not a Philistine herself) and the main beneficiaries of the story are the Philistines. It is not just that Samson crosses into Philistine geographic space, or that he seeks Philistine social circles or romances with Philistine women, the narrative space itself becomes Philistine! We have a story in which the protagonist comes close to taking on the antagonist's identity, a story that is easily imagined as a Philistine-composed heroine story. Samson is not just a liminal character, having both an Israelite and Philistine identity. The narrative space of the story itself slides between an Israelite judgeship story and a Philistine heroine story. The transgression of the geographic and physical, bodily spaces call into question the very definitions of "Israelite" and "Philistine." It seems there are no reliable, stable ethnic boundaries in the story.

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[57] Schneider (*Judges*, 224) also compares Delilah to Jael, indicating that this is the third time in Judges that a woman captures and kills an enemy. The first woman was Jael, a foreign woman, captured and killed Sisera. The second woman was the unnamed woman who killed Abimelech with the upper millstone. She writes of Delilah, "This last example brings the book full circle with a foreign woman destroying an enemy leader but this time the enemy was Israel" (224). Cf. Ackerman, "What If Judges Had Been Written by a Philistine?," 36.

[58] Ackerman, "What If Judges Had Been Written by a Philistine?," 37.

The narrative is losing control over Samson and his story. His mobility threatens all kinds of spaces and categories. If the narrative itself slips and slides across Israelite and Philistine boundaries, in what other ways might it transgress its narrative frame? Even the narrative space cannot contain Samson.

Crossing the Boundary of the Narrative Frame

Samson's story starts in Judges 13 with the foretelling of his birth by an angel to his barren mother. Judges 13 uses the "annunciation" type scene, in which God communicates the unexpected pregnancy and future of the child. Similar scenes happen with Hagar (Genesis 16; 21:8-21), Sarah (Gen 18:9-15), and Rebekah (Gen 25:22-23).[59] In each case, themes of fertility and the need for a new generation arise. The annunciation follows a similar pattern in each case. It often includes a theophany of some kind with news for the woman, delivered by God or a messenger for God. There are usually specific instructions about the child. An offering or sacrifice is offered and there is some allusion to the divine name.[60] The form of the annunciation to Samson's mother leads the reader to believe that Samson will be a hero in the same vein as the birth of other heroes (Isaac in Genesis 18; Jacob in Genesis 25:21-28; Samuel in 1 Samuel 1:2). However, as described above, Samson is a transgressive figure that is

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[59] Robert Alter, "How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible's Annunciation Type-Scene," *Prooftexts* 3, no. 2 (May 1, 1983): 115–130; Robert Alter, "Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention," *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 2 (December 1, 1978): 355–368; Niditch, *Judges*, 142. Robert Alter performed the first study on the annunciation type scene, in which he articulates how each culture develops distinctive codes for telling stories. These are signals used by ancient writers to communicate nuanced meanings of their stories. He suggests that type-scenes are recurrent literary conventions that "may in some instances reflect certain social or cultural realities but is bound to offer a highly mediated, stylized image of such realities: in the literary convention, culture has been transformed into text" (1983, 119). He goes on to explore the annunciation type-scene as it occurs throughout the Hebrew Bible (with Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Samson's mother, Hannah, and the Shunamite woman). He demonstrates that though the motif remains the same for each annunciation type-scene, there are subtle modifications from one occurrence to the next that infuse the scene with new meanings and expectations.

[60] Niditch, *Judges*, 142.

constantly thrust outside the human, male, and Israelite community. Does his story square with its beginning?

Schneider argues that although Samson's annunciation is similar to several other annunciation stories, it also differs in some important ways.[61] She compares the foretelling of Samson's birth in Judges 13 to the foretelling of Isaac's birth in Genesis 18. In Genesis, the messenger visits Abraham, never speaking directly to Sarah. By contrast, Samson's mother is the direct recipient of the message and speaks directly to the messenger herself. In fact, in Genesis 18, Abraham is the one who has the constant contact with the deity, while Sarah has very little contact with the deity and is never told directly that she will bear a child. But, in Judges 13, Manoah has almost no contact with the deity, and even when the messenger does speak directly to Manoah, the information about the birth of the child is truncated.[62] This key change in the structure of the annunciation form is a clue that Samson's story will be different from those that came before.

Samson's annunciation does bear some resemblance to the foretelling of Ishmael's birth to Hagar. Like Manoah's wife, Hagar (not Abraham, the unborn child's father) is the recipient of a divine message concerning the child she will bear (Genesis 16, 21). Both Ishmael and Samson fit the description of a "wild ass of a man" (Gen 16:12). However, Hagar is an Egyptian slave woman bearing the child of her Israelite master, while Manoah's wife is an Israelite insider, the wife of a man from the tribe of Dan. What does it say about Samson that his birth narrative bears likeness to that of

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[61] Schneider, *Judges*, 197.
[62] Ibid.

Ishmael, a half Egyptian son of a slave woman? Does the narrative attempt to disown Samson before his story is really told?

The instructions about Samson's nazirite upbringing may be a key reason the message is delivered directly to his mother. There are dietary restrictions she must follow during her pregnancy. She is to avoid alcohol, grapes or grape products, and anything unclean. Most scholars look to Numbers 6 to help guide their interpretation of the somewhat obscure reference to the nazirite vow. The basic root meaning of *nāzir* is "to take away from normal usage," "to separate."[63] Numbers 6 indicates that both men and women who wished to separate themselves temporarily from ordinary participation in the culture voluntarily took the vow. The vow restricted the adherent from wine and strong drink, and grapes and anything produced from grapes. Nazirites were also commanded not to cut their hair for the time that they were consecrated, and neither were they to touch a corpse. At the conclusion of the time of separation, the nazirite was to bring a special offering to the tent of meeting where the priest would present it as a sin offering and burnt offering, after which the nazirite would shave his/her head.

Several scholars have noticed that the restrictions with regard to wine and touching dead bodies resemble those placed upon priests (Leviticus 10 and 21).[64] In some ways, the restrictions surpass those required of priests, making more stringent demands on nazirites. The nazirite vow of Numbers 6 specifies that the nazirite must separate him/herself from "wine and strong drink" and also refrain from drinking "wine vinegar or other vinegar, and shall not drink any grape juice or eat grapes, fresh or dried.

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[63] Christine Hahn, "The Understanding of the Nazirite Vow," in *A God of Faithfulness: Essays in Honour of J. Gordon McConville on His 60th Birthday*, ed. Jamie A. Grant, Alison Lo, and Gordon Wenham (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 46.

[64] Ibid., 48; Niditch, "Defining and Controlling Others Within: Hair, Identity, and the Nazirite Vow in a Second Temple Context," 76.

All their days as nazirites they shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins" (Numbers 6:3-4). While there are restrictions regarding wine consumption in priestly legislation (Leviticus 10:8-11), these are limited to the time of service in the tent of meeting. Priests were also restricted with regard to proximity to corpses, though only the high priest was restricted from approaching the corpses of their closest family members (Leviticus 21:10-11) while priests were allowed to bury their immediate family members (Leviticus 21:1-3).[65]

However, the nazirite vow is *not* a priestly vow. First, the nazirite vow is far more democratizing than the priestly vows of Leviticus. Numbers 6 clearly indicates that both men and women can voluntarily take a nazirite vow, stipulating no restrictions on who is eligible to make the vow (excepting perhaps the implicit assumption that those making the nazirite vow have the economic means to make the final offering or any additional offerings if the vow goes awry).[66] Second, Niditch skillfully demonstrates that the nazirite vow may actually be a mechanism for drawing distinctions between charismatic holy men and the priestly class. Niditch sets the nazirite vow in a post-exilic Persian Yehud, where she says the priestly description of nazirism in Numbers 6 may reflect a power struggle between various sources of political and religious power. In her view, the prescriptions for the nazirite vow in Numbers 6 could be a way of controlling the rise of charismatic holy men by making their position less unique as a holy status available to everyone. She imagines the nazirite to be someone able to afford the loss of

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[65] Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, ed. Nahum M. Sarna and Chaim Potok (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 46.

[66] Niditch, "Defining and Controlling Others Within: Hair, Identity, and the Nazirite Vow in a Second Temple Context," 80.

expensive animals for sacrifice, perhaps one of the *'am hā'āreṣ* ("people of the land").

She writes,

> In the postexilic and Persian periods, such a seeker of status might be one of the newly wealthy Southerners, or Judeans, whose fortunes actually improved in the power vacuum created by the Babylonian conquest and the initial return after the exile…. Alternatively, the custom of noncharismatic Nazirism may have developed in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which scholars believe to have been quite well off economically during the periods of Babylonian and Persian control and quite similar in cultural and religious self-definition to their southern brothers.[67]

The nazirite vow occupies a liminal social status, temporarily elevating the oath-taker above simple lay status, but not giving priestly status either. On the one hand, the nazirite vow seems to blur the lines between lay and priest, but as Niditch demonstrates, it could also function to make a clearer distinction between lay and priest. Nazirite status seems to function to democratize holy consecration, but without giving the adherent the same social status as a priest.

Samson's nazirite vow deviates from the prescriptions in Numbers 6 in several important ways. First, the nazirite vow in Numbers 6 is a voluntary commitment, but Samson is committed to being a nazirite before his birth, so his nazirite status is not a technically a commitment that Samson makes himself. As his story progresses, it isn't clear that he even knows about his nazirite status. It is not until Judges 16 that his nazirite status is mentioned again, and then it seems to be the prescription against cutting his hair that is the major issue. In fact, it is not even clear how much of the nazirite lifestyle is to be part of Samson's life. Since the prohibition against shorn hair is the only part of the nazirite vow that is specifically ascribed to Samson. The messenger advises his mother to refrain from alcohol, grapes and grape products, and touching anything

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[67] Ibid.

unclean, but the messenger never indicates that Samson should also follow these guidelines.

Second, the nazirite vow in Numbers 6 is clearly a temporary vow, evidenced by the elaborate description of how the vow is ritually completed (Numbers 6:13-21), but Samson's vow seems to be a lifelong commitment, and one that does not seem to require any kind of ritual when the vow is violated. For example, Samson travels through the vineyards of Timnah in Judges 14 and kills a lion, whose carcass from which he later returns to eat honey. This would seem to violate at least the prescription against touching dead bodies (which, is curiously not mentioned to Samson's mother, but is clearly part of the prescriptions of Numbers 6). It may also violate the prescription against grapes and grape-products, since the scene takes place in a vineyard. However, Samson never completes the rituals for breaking the vow after this incident. Samson also participates in the wedding feast (Judg 14:10), where wine would presumably be served; he spends time in the valley of Sorek (vine), further violations of the nazirite vow. In order to deliver the thirty linen garments after the failed riddle wager, Samson slaughters thirty men of Ashkelon, and strips them of their festal garments, indicating that he came in contact with corpses (Judg 14:19-20). He also uses the jawbone of an ass to kill thousands at Lehi. Samson does not make the required sacrifices after any of these infractions. Either he does not know about the vow, or he does not take the vow very seriously.[68]

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[68] Schneider, *Judges*, 205; Robert B. Chisholm, "Identity Crisis : Assessing Samson's Birth and Career," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (2009): 147–162. Schneider argues that Samson did know about his nazirite status, since the text stresses the rules for the nazirite prior to his birth and explicitly tells us that Samson did not tell his parents about his exploits in the vineyard (which, she assumes is because he knows they will be displeased). Robert Chisholm is less convinced, arguing that either Samson didn't know about the vow, or only certain aspects of the vow applied to him. Chisholm entertains the possibility that Samson was exempt from proscriptions against grapes or corpses.

Third, the nazirite vow described in Numbers 6 seems to have a primarily social function (changing the status and relationship of the adherent to his/her community and to God). There is no charisma involved.[69] But, in Samson's story the vow seems to be connected to Samson's strength. Specifically, the vow seems connected to Samson's hair, as it is clearly broken when Samson's hair is cut and he is sapped of his strength. Whereas Numbers 6 indicates that cutting one's hair is a sign that the nazirite vow has ended, the vow does not seem to be complete when Samson's hair is cut. Rather, Samson regains his strength once his hair grows, allowing him a final victory over his Philistine enemies.

In all of these ways, Samson's nazirite vow does not fit with the nazirite prescriptions of Numbers 6, but it also does not fit with the instructions relayed to his mother in Judges 13. Samson seems to simply fail to uphold the qualities of a nazirite.[70] But, is Samson's failure to uphold the tenants of the vow important to the story? There is never any sense of the function of the vow for the story, so the reader is at a loss to know

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[69] Niditch, *Judges*, 143.

[70] The failure of Samson to uphold the tenants of the nazirite vow has been the source of much scholarly debate. Joseph Blenkinsopp ("Structure and Style in Judges 13-16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82, no. 1 [March 1, 1963]: 65–76) reads the nazirite vow as the central and defining feature of the structure and plot of Samson's story. But, Exum ("The Theological Dimension of the Samson Saga," 30–45.) points out that a major flaw in Blenkinsopp's argument is that there is no evidence that Samson's alleged violations of the Nazirite regulations (esp. Judg 14:5-9, 10-20) have the Nazirite vow in mind, and moreover Blenkinsopp must ignore major portions of the saga in order to mount his argument (32). Although Exum does not discount the theological importance of the nazirite vow to Samson's saga, she is eager to avoid overestimating its importance (44). While Blenkinsopp and Exum are interested in the function of Samson's nazirite status in the story, Niditch ("Defining and Controlling Others Within: Hair, Identity, and the Nazirite Vow in a Second Temple Context," 78) is interested in understanding it historically. She argues that the nazirite proscriptions against drinking wine and contact with corpses are probably late priestly additions to the nazirite vow, indicating that earlier iterations of the nazirite vow probably allowed the nazirite's status to overlap with other kinds of social status. For example, Samuel is a nazirite and a priest. Amos puts the nazirite alongside the prophet, and Samson is a nazirite and a warrior/judge (78). From this point of view, Samson's lack of adherence to the nazirite vow (as found in Num 6) is not a failure at all, but a natural eliding of the nazirite and judge roles. Christine Hahn "The Understanding of the Nazirite Vow," 56) observes that though the nazirite vow is thrust upon Samson, the text does not signal that the vow has any specific purpose. We are clear that Samson violated the vow, but we are never clear that Samson is completely inadequate as a result.

whether Samson's transgression of the vow's expectations render him inadequate in some way.[71] What purpose does the vow serve?

Samson's nazirite oath becomes a major aspect of the way in which Samson's body space is constructed. As demonstrated above, the prescription against cutting his hair is an important piece of Samson's bodily description and sets the tone for the reader's understanding of him as animalistic, and also serves to physically differentiate him from the Philistines.[72] But, Niditch argues that long hair seems to be characteristic of epic warrior men in the Hebrew Bible.[73] Could not Samson's hair have been adequately explained by his warrior-judge status, making the mention of the nazirite vow superfluous?

As noted above, the main advantage of taking the nazirite oath seems to be the altered social status it provides. The nazirite vow allowed a special consecration and special relationship to the divine. Certainly long hair would be an outward sign of one's altered social status, but the prescriptions against social activities, such as refraining from drinking wine or abstaining from funerary rites may have been an even more obvious signal of one's new social status.[74] However, Samson does not abide by the admonitions against these social activities, and therefore does not have an opportunity to take advantage of any special social status they may provide. In fact, Samson scarcely

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[71] Hahn, "The Understanding of the Nazirite Vow," 56.

[72] Niditch, "Defining and Controlling Others Within: Hair, Identity, and the Nazirite Vow in a Second Temple Context," 83. Niditch writes that pictorial evidence of premonarchic periods, and for the ninth century B.C.E. indicates that men wore their hair at shoulder-length. Eighth century B.C.E. reliefs found at Lachish indicate that some of the men fighting for Judah wore head coverings (hats, wraps, helmets), but those without head coverings are depicted with shorter, curly hair.

[73] For example, David's son Absalom is also depicted as having long hair. Niditch also suggests that Judg 5:2 may also refer to a warrior's long hair. Niditch writes, "Like circumcision (see 14:3), the hairdo is a body trait that serves to mark and define a person's identity as a member of one group or another as a special individual within one's own society." Niditch, *Judges*, 144.

[74] Niditch, "Defining and Controlling Others Within: Hair, Identity, and the Nazirite Vow in a Second Temple Context," 84.

seems aware of God's presence in the story (except, perhaps, the two prayers he utters [Judg 15:18, 16:28]). Could not Samson's prayers and special strength be just as easily ascribed to his status as a judge? Why make him a nazirite at all, if the story does not take advantage of the special social status the nazirite vow allows?

Judges 13 frames the narrative with the foretelling of Samson's birth and his nazirite vow, but the remainder of the story seems to step out of this frame to take the story in other directions. In terms of genre, the use of the annunciation type-scene sets us up for a hero tale about a special nazirite servant of God, but ultimately we get a story that ends with Israel still in Philistine control, with a de-consecrated hero (the Lord leaves Samson in Judg 16:20). His failure to subdue the Philistines and deliver Israel from Philistine control causes us to question the initial annunciation scene that starts the story, since he does not succeed in the mission ascribed to him at the start.[75] Does the annunciation scene, typically reserved for Israelite heroes simply set us up to see Samson as a failed hero? Do the repeated nazirite prescriptions set the stage for Samson's failure on a cultic level?

Samson's story jumps out of its own frame. In terms of characterization, Samson is hardly the hero we might have expected at the beginning. By the conclusion of his story, Samson is powerless to fix the situation that initiated his story and his birth. He even transgresses his own characterization as a warrior. The story defies readerly expectations, not in ways that make the story wholly unsatisfying, but in ways that take

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[75] Judg 13:5 reads, "He shall be the first to deliver Israel from the Philistines," or "He shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines." So, which is it? Will Samson be the first (of several) to deliver Israel from the Philistines? Or will he only *begin* to deliver Israel from the Philistines? The text is ambiguous about Samson's success.

the reader by surprise and cause us to pause a moment while we consider why Samson's story is one worth telling.

We have a story that we can barely classify, about a character who is neither wholly human nor wholly animal, who is equal parts feminine and masculine, and whose ethnic identity is blurred. Categories are fluid and ambiguous in this story. It is not the kind of story that invites a rally of communal identity. Why tell this story? What does it do for the community?

Conclusion

Mobility constitutes a form of "superdeviance" because it threatens to disrupt the social stability of places. Samson's constant motion means that he is constantly *between* places. Samson's constant mobility means that he rarely pauses long enough for any particular place to become his "homestead," and the "superdeviance" that constitutes his movement means that he is not welcome to return (or able to do so, since he destroys so many places).

Moreover, Samson's "superdeviance" of mobility makes him the consummate stranger. A "stranger" is defined by proximity and the enforcement of boundaries, not recognizability. Samson is a familiar fellow; not the kind of person you fail to recognize. He is even narratively familiar: a typological character that is easily recognizable even across cultures. Moreover, his character fills every space, if not physically then socially. He is a hulk (Judg 16:3) and the life of the party (Judg 14:10). But, Samson is also a boorish brute. He is not the type of person anyone would want to meet in a dark alley. Anywhere Samson arrives is "too close" for comfort. Still, Samson's proximity is not

always a negative thing. His ogreish qualities are occasionally beneficial (e.g., he ensures the safety of vineyard workers and crop by slaying the lion; he protects the people at Lehi).

This transgression of borders and boundaries renders Samson simultaneously familiar and strange, proximate and distant. He performs role of stranger, as Ahmed describes it: "To name some-body as a stranger is already to recognize them, to know them again: the stranger becomes a commodity fetish that is circulated and exchanged in order to define the borders and boundaries of given communities."[76] Samson is not a hero we want to claim as our own, but a commodity whose constant border crossings help identify which borders and boundaries are important and which are negligible.

Perhaps the reader gains some perspective by putting Samson's story alongside Ehud's story. These two stories offer different approaches to space and physical and social ways of moving through space. Samson is physically strong, while Ehud is physically handicapped ("bound in the right hand"). Samson sleeps with the enemy; Ehud assassinates the enemy. Ehud penetrates; Samson is penetrated. Samson is inspired to violence out of revenge, while Ehud premeditates his attack against Eglon. Samson destroys built spaces (Timnah's fields, the gate at Gaza, Dagon's temple). Ehud manipulates and uses built spaces to his advantage.

The contrast in the leadership strategies of Ehud and Samson points to different experiences with space and approaches to Empire, and a varied understanding of who Israel is. Ehud represents a subversive resistance to Empire, or the use of "tactics" to employ de Certeau's language. As a leader of the oppressed class of persons, Ehud

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[76] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 150.

demonstrates that cunning is just as powerful as brute strength. Meanwhile, Samson's leadership represents an acculturation with Empire. He boldly transgresses physical and social boundaries to achieve a degree of intimacy with the Philistines. Although Samson does not become entirely Philistine, he does participate in Philistine culture, even taking a Philistine wife. Samson does not need to employ subversive tactics as Ehud does, because he has political and social (not to mention physical) power (capital) among the Philistines. In Ehud's story, Israelite geographic and social space is nebulous. Even as Empire is resisted, Israel is defined in relation to Empire (as non-Moabite) and a clearly Israelite space is not delineated. In Samson's story, Empire is not resisted in quite the same way, but the boundaries and borders are explored. Unlike Ehud who makes a quick and targeted cross into the enemy territory, Samson moves back and forth between Philistine and Israelite spaces.

Samson can be reduced to a commodity, an expendable character who is used to illustrate the necessity of borders and boundaries. He could represent a simple model of colonial power – an alternative to Ehud. Or, maybe he challenges a definition of home(land) and homecoming that equates home with stasis, boundaries, and fixity. By this definition, home(land) is where we feel comfortable and relaxed – too comfortable to critically engage the limits or borders of the home(land) experience; too relaxed to consider that "safe" and "comfortable" are also restrictive.[77]

For all the negative aspects of Samson's character – the ways he obscures categories, boundaries, identities; the way he breaks all the rules and threatens well-being – maybe his one positive characteristic is precisely the thing we fear most about him: his mobility and deviance. In his constant motion, he challenges the reader to

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[77] Ibid., 87.

consider limits and borders. He refuses to allow "home" to be a static condition where familiarity and comfort come before critical engagement with others. He forces us to consider whether what we experience as "home" is not really a prison. Of course, he does this while simultaneously risking losing the community to the Philistines altogether. We love to hate Samson and we hate to love him.

Chapter Five:

Foreignness and Failed Community:
Israel's Alienation through Violence in Judges 19-21

One of the challenges of migration, homesteading/homecoming, and reimplacement is the telling of new stories that will produce a collective "we" rather than simply reflecting on the situation.[1] The stories of Ehud and Samson invite the reading/listening community to consider the complexity of their social world, and how the engagement of social space shapes identity. But do these stories produce a community? The final story under consideration will raise the same question. Does the textual space produce a community? Or better, do we recognize the community it produces, and to what effect?

The narrative of Judges 19-21 is perhaps one of the most violent stories of the Hebrew Bible. The story opens with the relationship between a Levite and his woman, a relationship that is fraught with dysfunction, though the reader is not told of what variety. All we can know for sure is that the woman becomes angry and leaves the Levite's home in Ephraim for her father's house in Bethlehem, acting of her own accord.[2] After some four months pass, the Levite finally decides to journey to the home of the woman's father to "speak tenderly to her" (Judg 19:3, NRSV), though, once he arrives, his words and actions are directed only to her father. Arriving in Bethlehem, the Levite is heartily welcomed by the woman's father, who entreats him to stay for a meal. In fact, the father

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[1] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 91.

[2] There is a textual discrepancy here. The LXX reports that the concubine "became angry" while the MT reports that she "became a prostitute." Most scholars prefer the LXX reading, using similar logic to that of Robert Boling, that it would make very little sense for the woman to return to her father's home (bringing shame upon her father) if she had been unfaithful to her husband. For more information, see Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 273.

pleads with the Levite to stay day after day until five days pass and the Levite is determined to leave, with his woman. The Levite, his woman, and his servant set out for Ephraim late in the day and will not arrive in Ephraim before nightfall. The servant suggests that they stay in Jebus, but the Levite scorns the idea of lodging among strangers and insists instead that they stay in Gibeah, among the Israelites.

This proves to be a fateful choice. Awaiting an offer of hospitality in the town square, the traveling trio finally finds lodging with an elderly man from Ephraim. Once they are settled in the man's home, enjoying some food and beverage, the men of Gibeah surround the house and demand that the Levite come out so that they can rape him. Wishing to preserve his guest, the Ephraimite host offers his virgin daughter and the Levite's woman instead. The crowd will not hear it, so the man sends his woman out to be wantonly raped and abused all night long. She returns in the morning, half alive, to the threshold of the home. The Levite hoists her limp body onto his donkey and transports her back to his home in Ephraim, where he dismembers her (dead?) body and sends the pieces to the tribes of Israel, demanding that they take action. This incites "all Israel" to rise up against Gibeah – indeed, all of Benjamin – in a devastating civil war. Before the story ends, women are abducted from Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh in order to save the Benjaminites from extinction. It is a gruesome tale of abduction, murder, rape, and civil war.

Throughout the story in Judges 19-21, the anonymity of the characters stands in contrast to the identifiable places and spaces in which the characters find themselves (especially with the specific mention of places such as Ephraim, Bethlehem, and

Gibeah).[3] The places mentioned in the story are geographically recognizable, but also socially recognizable. The Levite and his woman move in and out of home spaces, public squares, and even liminal spaces "on the road" intended for travel between places. We, the readers, know (if in very broad terms) what to expect of these spaces. Domestic, home space is the space of women. Public squares are where men negotiate. Roads are where people travel between spaces, preferably not alone (particularly women).

The trouble is that the characters in this story do not conform to our expectations of the spaces they occupy. Men dominate domestic space. Women are thrust into the public square. People *do* travel alone. A closer look at the characterization and development of spaces in Judges 19-21 reveals much more spatial ambiguity: the woman transgresses social norms when she travels alone. The Levite transgresses social and geographic boundaries, and is subsequently held temporarily captive in, the father-in-law's space. The Levite, his servant, and the woman trespass into Gibeahite territory. Again and again, characters slide in and out-of-place. The Levite's woman may be the slipperiest of them all, finding herself torn between two homes (the Levite's and her father's), and then literally torn into pieces and in many places at once. The Levite, a member of the one tribe with no allotted territory, is the consummate guest: he does not properly "belong" in any of the places in which the story puts him.

An understanding of who belongs (and who does not) goes hand-in-hand with mapping geographic and social terrain. Drawing social boundaries is part of creating a

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[3] Don Michael Hudson, "Living in a Land of Epithets : Anonymity in Judges 19-21," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* no. 62 (Je 1994): 49–66. The absence of proper names throughout Judges 19-21 renders the characters anonymous. Don Hudson argues that naming is what makes it possible to function on the relational level. Naming orients a person to his/her world. "Without a name" Hudson writes, "the person immediately enters the realm of objectification and inauthentic living, but an authentic person is one who is both a namer and a hearer of names, both an I and a Thou" (1994, 56). Hudson argues that the anonymity of the characters in Judges 19-21 both universalizes them (i.e. "every man did right in his eyes,") but also is a literary device that deconstructs naming, meaning, and identity.

recognizable and functional physical and social world. When these boundaries are transgressed, the established order of things is upset and we become (even more) aware of the existence and necessity of well-defined (and defended) boundaries.

Narratively, established boundaries make it possible for the reader to predict what might happen because the reader is able to enter into the space, if only through imagination, and sympathize with the characters. Judges 19-21 is different, though. As the characters in the story transgress and trespass the geographical, physical, and social boundaries, the incongruities between places and characters and their expected behavior is obscured. This creates a narrative environment that prevents the reader from coming too close to the plot or the characters.

E. T. A. Davidson sees an "alienation effect" in the book of Judges in the way in which violence is depicted casually, and even comedically. This prevents the reader from identifying with the suffering of the characters. The comedic violence counteracts the horrors described in its pages, which serves to blind the reader from the magnitude of the pain, suffering, and bloodshed, Davidson argues.[4] Is it possible that the "alienation effect" goes beyond the manner in which violence is depicted and can be observed in the characterization of Israel in Judges 19-21?

Four primary characters in Judges 19-21 are the focus of the following analysis: the Levite, the woman, the Gibeahites, and "all Israel." Each character is portrayed as geographically, physically, and socially out-of-place. This phenomenon puts distance between the characters and the reader so that the characters feel unfamiliar. The

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[4] E T A. Davidson, "The Comedy of Horrors," *Proceedings (Grand Rapids, Mich.)* 23 (January 1, 2003): 39.

alienated, out-of-place nature of so many leading characters in Judges 19-21 estranges Israel, which is a colonial coping mechanism.

Levite: The Quintessential Guest

The Levite is a guest in every space throughout the story. Guests occupy a unique liminal social and spatial place. Neither a stranger nor an insider, a guest is welcome, but only temporarily. A guest could be a type of transgressor by Cresswell's definition of the term: someone who crosses into forbidden social or physical space. The guest represents a middle status, somewhere between stranger and insider, permanent and temporary, interloper and one that belongs.

The liminal spatial status of the Levite is made most obvious by his very designation as a Levite, or member of the tribe of Levi. The Levites are a landless tribe (Deut 10:9) who are supposed to be supported by the tithes of the rest of Israel (Deut 14:29). Therefore, even the Levite's residence in Ephraim is referred to as *gûr* (sojourning), which indicates a temporary residence.[5] Before we know anything else about the Levite, we know that he is a guest in his own home, and a homesteader in Ephraim. His place in the land, and among the people, must be negotiated.

The Levite is also a guest in the home of his father-in-law. When his woman leaves his home in Ephraim and sets out, alone, for her father's home in Bethlehem, the Levite decides (some four months later) to retrieve her. When the Levite arrives, the text reports that his father-in-law is overjoyed to receive him, offers him food, drink, and a place to rest—in other words, he *hosts* the Levite.

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[5] Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 247.

As a guest, the Levite has little autonomy in his father-in-law's home. As the father-in-law successfully manages to detain the Levite for five days, we begin to see that the Levite is more than just physically out-of-place, he is also socially out-of-place in the father-in-law's home where he is at a social disadvantage compared to the father-in-law. Mieke Bal proposes that the scene represents a power struggle between virilocal and patrilocal marriage systems. Patrilocal marriage is a marriage system by which the married couple lives in the house of the bride's father. Virilocal marriage requires that the wife move to live with her new husband. Bal asserts that this story represents a shift between the two systems, marking a change in power positions between fathers and husbands.[6] By this logic, the move of the woman back to her father's home shifts the power toward her father and away from the Levite. When the Levite arrives to retrieve his wife, the father-in-law's joy may be reflective of the fact that the couple will now live in a patrilocal marriage. This may also be why the father-in-law implores the Levite to stay, and also why the Levite is eager to leave. As long as he remains in his father-in-law's home, his father-in-law will have power over him and his relationship with the woman. If we accept Bal's argument, then the Levite's sojourn to the father-in-law's home may constitute a resistance against patrilocal marriage. His retrieval of the woman and entrance into the father-in-law's space draws attention to the issue of virilocal and patrilocal marriage and puts each male figure in a position to defend his right to the woman.

Beyond the power play at work in the virilocal/patrilocal exchange between the two men, the whole situation calls the Levite's masculinity into question, making him

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[6] Mieke Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 86.

out-of-place in male culture. The brazenness of the woman must reflect poorly on the

Levite's masculinity, as he obviously cannot control her enough to keep her in his home.

The woman evidently does not need or want the Levite. She does not return of her own

accord, and the Levite waits several months to fetch her. With each passing day his

symbolic masculine capital diminishes. Moreover, the woman's courageous move puts

the Levite in a position where he must renegotiate his virilocal marriage with the

woman's father. The movement of the woman shows the diminished power of the Levite.

If the woman's spontaneous move from the Levite's home is a wound to his

masculinity, the remainder of the story makes up for this momentary lack of male control

by focusing on male relationships, and allowing male characters to hyper-control the

woman's movements. Once the Levite finally decides to retrieve the wayward woman,

the story turns to explore the relationship between the two men. As Phyllis Trible

observes, "A journey to 'speak to her heart' has become a visit to engage male hearts,

with no speech to her at all."[7] Boling also notices that, "It was a man's world. There is no

mention of the interest of the girl in rejoining her husband, nor of what the women folk

did while the two men celebrated for most of a week."[8] In fact, the nameless woman

utters not one word in the entirety of the narrative, and neither does any character directly

speak to her.

When the Levite, his servant, and the woman finally manage to leave the father's

home, it is late in the day and they will not make it back to the Levite's home in Ephraim

before sun down. As they set out on this late-day journey, the Levite is all but

guaranteeing that he, and his traveling companions, will need to be someone's guest

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[7] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), 69.
    [8] Boling, *Judges*, 274.

before they arrive home to Ephraim. As they near Jebus (Jerusalem), the Levite's servant suggests that the traveling trio consider lodging there for the evening. In what becomes an ironic exchange, the Levite refuses to lodge in a city of foreigners, "who do not belong to the people of Israel" (Judges 19:12). Instead, the travelers continue on to Gibeah and choose to lodge among the Benjaminites, fellow Israelites, which would seem the safer choice to the Levite. Although we have no way of knowing whether the stay in Jebus would have been any less hostile, the irony is that Gibeah, despite being a familiar people, proves to be a treacherous place to stay for the Levite and his woman.

The story turns ominous when the traveling trio arrives in Gibeah and sits in the open square, but no one offers them any hospitality. Here, among their own people, the voyagers are not welcomed as insiders, not even greeted as guests. They are shunned as strangers. Finally, an old man returning from his work in the field notices the wayfarers and begins asking questions. His first question, "Where are you going and where do you come from?" indicates that he does not immediately recognize the members of the group, even though the Levite and the old man share a common origin: Ephraim. The old man is also a guest in Gibeah. The irony thickens: the Ephraimite host is also hosted in this place. The detail makes the Gibeahites seem that much more distrustful of, and inhospitable to, the strange traveling trio since the only one to offer them any lodging is also a guest in their midst.

The Gibeahite distrust of strangers is made especially clear when the men of the city demand the Ephraimite host to send out the Levite so that they can rape him. For a second time, the out-of-place Levite's masculinity is threatened. Ken Stone explains that the demand to rape the Levite is an attempt on the part of the men of the city to assert

their dominance over him by sexually penetrating him, signifying his social submission.

Eager to preserve the honor of his guest, the host offers his virgin daughter and the

Levite's concubine instead.[9] The men of the city are not interested in humiliating the

Ephraimite host, so they reject the offer of his virgin daughter, accepting only the

Levite's concubine. By raping the concubine, Stone argues that the Levite's honor is

diminished, since in an honor-shame culture a male's honor depends (in part) on his

ability to control and protect the women in his household. By wantonly raping his

concubine, the men of the city demonstrate that the Levite has no control over what

happens to the woman of his household.[10] The concubine is a constant reminder of the

Levite's bruised masculinity. The exercise of her agency at the beginning of the story

demonstrates the Levite's waning male influence. The remainder of the concubine's

movement is hyper-controlled by the Levite in particular, as if to demonstrate that he is

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[9] As Trible argues, "Male power confronts male power" in this scene. See Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 79; See also: Ken Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject-Honor, Object-Shame?," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 67 (1995): 97.

[10] Katharina von Kellenbach, "Am I a Murderer?: Judges 19-21 as a Parable of Meaningless Suffering," in *Strange Fire* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 176–191; Susan Niditch, *Judges* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 193.Katharina von Kellenbach (2000) makes a similar argument to Stone's. She argues that the Levite is put in a position of making a "choiceless choice," comparing the inhuman choice he is forced to make to those innumerable inhuman choices forced upon Jewish men and women during the Holocaust. Backing the Levite into a place where all the choices are bad choices is part of the Gibeahites' strategy for demoralizing him. She writes, "His concubine serves as his surrogate. Through her, they attack him. Her rape and defilement brings the added pleasure of demoralizing him. The Gibeonites succeed in dehumanizing the Levite by forcing him into what Lawrence Langer has called a 'choiceless choice.' The moment the Levite abandons her, his attackers have achieved their goal of humiliating and dehumanizing him. His act breaks his dignity and self-respect as a man. His inability to protect his wife 'feminizes' him (almost) as effectively as if they had raped him" (2000, 181). Niditch also sees an honor-shame culture at work in this text. She draws a parallel between the obvious sexual violence in this story and the sexual innuendos in Ehud's story. In both stories, the man who defeats his enemy does so by penetrating him, and humiliating him by making him a "mere" woman by metaphorically raping him. However, the difference between these two stories is that Ehud penetrates a Moabite, drawing a distinction between Israel and Moab. The rape of the Levite's concubine by the Gibeahites (fellow Israelites), demonstrates a fissure in the community whereby neighbors are mistaken for strangers. See also: Lawrence Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps," in *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications*, ed. John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 222–232.

completely in control. Except that he is *not* completely in control: the Levite's masculinity is once again threatened, this time by the men of Gibeah.

All of this seems to go a bit too far. At the conclusion of the story, the woman can only move if the Levite moves her himself. He now has too much control over her. Upon his return to his "home" (is the Levite ever truly at home?), the Levite dismembers his woman's (dead?) body into twelve pieces that he sends throughout Israel with the message "Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out." (Judg 19:30).[11] The woman serves as the Levite's last-ditch effort to save face. Once "all Israel" has arrived, the Levite gives his account of the events of Gibeah, changing some of the key details. He indicates that the Gibeahites intended to kill him, when in fact they intended to rape him. He neglects to mention that he gave his woman to the Gibeahites in order preserve himself, or that the woman was actually returned to him alive.[12] The alteration

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[11] There is a textual discrepancy here between the LXX and the MT. The translation here follows the LXX, as the MT omits any instruction to the messengers and instead abruptly ends with a declarative sentence. The LXX has the Levite commanding the messengers to ask the rhetorical question, "Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day?" The MT has "all who saw it" asking themselves the question. Boling (1975) suggests that "Since the LXX and MT cannot be harmonized, the original was probably longer than either variant" (277). See: Trent C. Butler, *Judges* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2009), 410; Robert H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 483–484; Boling, *Judges*, 277.

The MT has the effect of the narrator asking the audience to compare unique events in the history of Israel (the exodus and the death of the concubine) to find adequate resolution for themselves. This summons the readers/hearers into the space of the story, beckoning the reader into the ideological intricacies of the story world, begging her to think and act (a la Louis Althusser's "interpellation"). See Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001).

[12] Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19," 101. Stone suggests that the Levite's version of the details of the story is part of the symbolic confusion that is part of the ideology of the text. The rape of the woman is followed by her death, leading Stone to conclude that the Levite might have been right to assume that his rape would have lead to his death. The interchangeability of the Levite and the woman is exactly what the men of Gibeah intended to communicate to the Levite, and is what the Levite communicates to the Israelites. Moreover, Stone doubts that if the Levite had relayed the events exactly as they happened that the reaction from his audience would have been any different. Therefore, Stone suggests that the Levite may not be an "irresponsible liar," but has merely internalized the ideology of his honor-shame culture. Trible sees the Levite's response as a willful distortion of the actual series of events. By virtue of the omission of his role in offering the concubine to be raped and the insinuation that the men of

of the story relieves the Levite of some of the shame associated with the event, but also reduces the woman to a simple pawn and denies the woman's role in preserving his life and reputation. By the end of the story, any damage done to the Levite's masculinity is overcompensated.

The Levite is out-of-place, but not just geographically. His liminal guest status penetrates even his role in male culture. On the one hand, the events of the story show him not to be masculine enough (e.g., losing control over his woman, the threat of male-on-male rape). On the other hand, his conduct shows him to be *too masculine*, to the point of monstrous acts of violence against the woman (e.g., allowing her to be raped, killed, and dismembered). The physical and social placelessness of the Levite makes it difficult to identify with his character. His presence seems justified in the places he physically finds himself, but he is never really "home." Socially, he is the victim of emasculation, but he is also the perpetrator of grotesque violence. Should we sympathize with his acts of violence or condemn them? Is he monstrous for carrying out such grotesque acts of violence against his woman, or is he simply responding to his dysfunctional situation in dysfunctional ways?

A more fearsome possibility exists: whether or not we can understand or sympathize with the Levite, we recognize him. Even if we cannot see any aspect of his character in ourselves, we know his type. We have seen him on the evening news. He's the quiet neighbor that no one suspected was capable of harming anyone, let alone someone close to him. In a way, although his anonymity and out-of-place nature obscure

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Gibeah killed the concubine, the Levite absolves himself of any guilt and therefore does not fear retribution for his mutilation of his concubine's body. See: Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 82.

any precise identification, they also allow us to recognize him more easily as the type of person we fear—the stranger who passes for a neighbor.

The Woman: Decimated and Disseminated

If the Levite's character is out-of-place so much more so is his woman. The story begins with the nameless woman who is introduced to us as the property of a Levite living in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim. Scholars cannot agree what kind of relationship the woman and the Levite have. The text says that the Levite "took" her, but the reader is not told what kind of arrangements were made. She is referred to simply as a *pîlegeš*, which Niditch argues is a "secondary wife," or a woman with a status lower than that of a wife, but higher than that of a harlot.[13] Trible does not afford her this much social status, writing that she is "virtually a slave, secured by a man for his own purposes."[14] Meanwhile, Bal equates the relationship with some form of marriage.[15] After all, the woman's father is referred to as the Levite's father-in-law. It is clear that her relationship with this man is a relationship that defines her socially, though the nature of the relationship is unclear. Even so, her decision to leave the Levite is a courageous and rebellious move in a patriarchal culture.

For unknown reasons, the woman becomes angry[16] with the Levite and leaves for her father's house in Bethlehem.[17] She makes the decision to leave and she travels alone

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[13] Niditch, *Judges*, 191.

[14] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 66.

[15] Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 84–86.

[16] There is a textual discrepancy here. The LXX reports that the concubine "became angry" while the MT reports that she "became a prostitute." Most scholars prefer the LXX reading, following Boling's logic that it would make very little sense for the woman to return to her father's home (bringing shame upon her father) if she had been unfaithful to her husband. Boling, *Judges*, 273.

[17] J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1981), 284; Susan Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19-20: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration,"

(the text makes no mention of any travel companions).[18] The woman draws attention to the inability of her male owner to control and protect her.[19] The woman's anger and her abrupt and independent decision to leave have caused some interpreters to wonder if the woman was unfaithful. The Hebrew (MT) and Syriac indicate that she "played the harlot" against the Levite. Indeed, leaving the Levite's home puts her in virilocal unfaithfulness. A woman who acts boldly on her own volition, defying the control of her husband is "loose." A woman out-of-place is a whore.

Catholic Biblical Quarterly 44 (1982): 365–378; Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*; Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 133; J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 178; Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19." The text does not tell us why the concubine leaves the Levite. J. Alberto Soggin (1981) assumes that the "matrimonial crisis" was the husband's responsibility, since the concubine is able to leave on her own and go back to her father's home (284). Niditch (1982) argues philologically that the LXX rendition (that the concubine "became angry") points to "family problems" (366). Stone (1995) mounts a narratological argument (following Exum [1993] and Fewell and Gunn [1993]) that regardless of whether the woman leaves because she is angry or because of some kind of sexual infidelity, she takes the initiative as an active subject to remove herself from her husband's presence, which stands in contrast to her narrative position in the rest of the chapter (91). Bal (1988) makes an anthropological argument that the woman leaves because of a conflict between an expectation of patrilocal marriage (where husband and wife live with the woman's father) and virilocal marriage (where husband and wife live in the husband's home). The concubine is caught in a terrible bind: if she lives with the Levite, she is unfaithful to her father. If she lives with her father, she is unfaithful to the Levite. Bal argues that this is where the language of infidelity comes from (82).

[18] Bohmbach writes,

> By inference, though, her successful journeying must have been a remarkable accomplishment. She would have had to make her way through all the highways and byways that lead from the remote uplands of the hill country of Ephraim down to Bethlehem, a city in the southern tribal area of Judah. Since she was probably traversing this country alone (the text never even hints at a travel companion) and on foot, the concubine would have had to be extremely self-reliant in order successfully to navigate whatever challenges and dangers the open road might have presented. Is not the independence of this woman 'on the move' quite remarkable? Karla G. Bohmbach,

"Conventions/Contraventions : The Meanings of Public and Private for the Judges 19 Concubine," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* no. 83 (June 1, 1999): 89.

[19] Andrew Hock-Soon Ng, "Revisiting Judges 19: A Gothic Perspective," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32 (2008): 201. Ng's article suggests that feminist readings (especially Exum, Bal, Trible) are prone to treating the text as misogynistic. Viewing the text as wholly and unabashedly misogynistic misses an opportunity to see the way in which the text subtly critiques the patriarchal order, Ng suggests. He writes, "The rape and murder of the concubine is meant, in this sense, to indict the patriarchal system and to expose the entrenched sinfulness of the *men*. Fathers and husbands who are supposed to function as guardians have renounced this vital role for the cowardly self-preservation" (201).

The defiant movement of the woman from Ephraim to Bethlehem challenges the patriarchal order. By physically moving from one location to another, the woman exposes the ineffectiveness of her patriarchal community to control her actions and decisions. Moreover, her successful movement from Ephraim to Bethlehem without male aid (contrasted with her sojourn from Bethlehem to Gibeah with male escorts) suggests that, in terms of safety, she is better off without the company of men. The woman's simple movement challenges a patriarchal system, but it also reveals that the community is not strong enough to regulate the systems that it relies on to order the society. Her action represents more than just a physical relocation. By acting outside the expected norms for a woman, she transgresses the social boundaries and expectations of a woman. She threatens the social order of the community by exposing its weaknesses.

The woman's journey from Ephraim to Bethlehem also reveals her physical and geographic placelessness in the story world. She is torn between two places – the Levite's home and her father's home. If she lives with the Levite, she lives in patrilocal unfaithfulness. If she lives in her father's home, she lives in virilocal unfaithfulness. She is denied permanent implacement, and a threat to implacement constitutes a threat to well-being.[20] Denying the woman a permanent homespace is paramount to denying her a sense of identity or self.

Not only is the concubine denied a physical home place, but she is also denied a social place in Israelite society. Women in the ancient world were most often found in the domestic sphere of life and built spaces, and (as indicated above), women were not often welcome (or safe) in public spaces. As Michael O'Connor writes, "Women, here as

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[20] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 307.

elsewhere in pre-modern society are set to do duty as representatives of the private, as men do duty as tokens of the public. Women are typically of the inside, the domestic sphere, while men are of the outside, the common sphere."[21] Women were expected to do the work of preparing food and rearing children—tasks that would largely keep them inside the home and out of the public eye.

Judges 19 features two curious scenes in the domestic sphere where men are eating and drinking and enjoying conviviality while women are invisible. In the first scene (Judg 19:4-9), the father-in-law invites the Levite (several times) to stay for food and drink and the two seem to commune together. The second scene is similar (Judg 19:16-26). The Ephraimite host invites the Levite and his travel companions into his home for the night, and offers the Levite food and drink. In both scenes, men enjoy each other's company and women are absent. It is not surprising that the woman is not described as taking part in the festivities since preparing food and participating in the conviviality of eating the food are two separate social spheres.[22] However, it is surprising that, in both of these domestic scenes, the story is entirely about what the men are doing in the domestic space, a space normally ascribed to women. The woman is erased from her own socially ascribed space.[23]

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[21] Michael Patrick O'Connor, "The Women in the Book of Judges," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (January 1, 1986): 279.

[22] In fact, food preparation would have been one of the primarily responsibilities of women. Carol Meyers writes,

> The conversion of raw materials into edible food was an enormously time-consuming and physically demanding task, and it usually was the responsibility of adult women. It is thus legitimate to assume that in ancient Israel, as in virtually all comparable agrarian societies, work classified in the category of cooking—that is, food preparation activities occurring within the residential compound—was done predominantly by women.

This logic explains why Samson's relegation to grinding flour at the mill was insulting to his masculinity: preparing raw materials into foodstuffs was the role of women, and the mill was "women's space." Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 145.

[23] Bohmbach, "Conventions/Contraventions," 93–94.

In fact, in this story, private spaces seem to offer no sanctuary for this woman. She is removed, seemingly without choice, from her father's home in Bethlehem. Her safety is jeopardized at the Ephraimite host's home, where she is cast out of the house to be gang raped within an inch of her life. And rather than being the expected place of convalescence, the Levite's home becomes the scene of her grisly dismemberment. Once again, the woman is not safe (or even welcome) in the private, domestic space of the Levite's home. After this final act of violence is perpetrated against her, she is thrust out into the public sphere for one last assault as her body parts are manhandled by "all Israel." The woman is stripped of any social space normally ascribed to women in the domestic sphere and is consistently shoved into the public sphere, where she is vulnerable and abused.[24]

The narrative seems to go into overdrive to repair the fissure exposed by the concubine's initial act of autonomy. The story seems to communicate that women's power and subjectivity have dire consequences, and therefore should be exercised with discretion. Contrary to what her self-initiated travel might indicate about public spaces, women are not welcome, and not safe, in public spheres, which the narrative goes to extremes to demonstrate. In the remainder of the tale, the concubine's experience in public spaces conforms to the cultural conventions of the ancient world. As Bohmbach writes, "Insofar as this woman is out in a public place, alone and at night, her positioning, and the ends to which it brings her, confirm the conventional wisdom that says 'a woman has no business being out alone at night', and 'anything that might happen to her there,

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[24] Ng writes that the silence of the concubine throughout the story and her ghost-like appearances can be thought of as a form of "textual burial." Ng, "Revisiting Judges 19," 203.

she deserves—she was just asking for it!'"[25] Exum goes so far as to assert that the

narrative punishment for the concubine's sexual autonomy (evidenced in her decision to

leave the Levite at the start of the story) is throwing her out into a public space where she

is gang-raped and her sexuality is symbolically mutilated.[26] By this logic, there is an

implicit narrative acknowledgement that public space is no place for a woman, and by

throwing the woman out of the house she "got what she deserved." Bohmbach goes on to

argue that the woman's out-of-placeness in the public sphere is narratively affirmed when

the details of the crime committed against her are not narrated. The narrative never

discloses the woman's actions, thoughts, speech, or feelings. It seems that she is so out-

of-place when she is thrown out of the house and into the public realm, that she becomes

invisible. "This woman is not supposed to be where she is, so that the narrative does not

see her," writes Bohmbach.[27]

 After she is gang raped, the woman falls limply at the door of the Ephraimite

host. She is neither inside nor outside the house, unable to benefit from the protection the

home might be able to afford, but not completely outside the house facing the harshness

of the public sphere either.[28] In this final act of transgression, the woman positions herself

on the threshold of the home as a bodily obstacle so that the Levite is forced to confront

her and the violence her body has endured. He is faced with the consequences of his own

emasculation.

The Levite orders the lifeless woman to "Get up," and when she gives no

response, he hoists her inanimate body on the donkey and hauls her back to his home in

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[25] Bohmbach, "Conventions/Contraventions," 86.
[26] Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 200.
[27] Bohmbach, "Conventions/Contraventions," 86.
[28] Trible writes that, "Symbolically, the door or doorway marks the boundary between hospitality and hostility." Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 71.

Ephraim. She makes the rest of the journey back to Ephraim with none of the agency or subjectivity that she began the story with. A lifeless, semi-conscious (dead?) shell of her former self, the concubine has been thoroughly beaten, assaulted, and raped. She will not soon be leaving him on her own volition. In fact, any movement she makes now will be completely at the hands of the Levite. She is totally under his control.

In her final movement in the story, the disseminated woman fades from view. Once a woman with great audacity, she is reduced to little more than a macabre messaging system. Her final inanimate move of the story renders her the most displaced character in the story. She is simultaneously in twelve places at once and in no place in particular. We can imagine the revulsion with which her dismembered body is probably met. Receiving a limb in the mail is horrific. In her final moment in the story, she is not welcome any place in Israel. She is the consummate transgressor, crossing twelve boundaries at once, and simultaneously calling each boundary into question.

The concubine's character alienates the reader more than any other. Especially as the violence perpetrated against her is hidden from narrative view, and her character is given almost no agency throughout the story (except her initial act of boldness), the reader is prevented from engaging with her on an emotional level. Intellectually, we know the violence she experiences is heinous, but the narrative stops short of allowing us to experience the gut-wrenching, stomach-turning magnitude of her grotesque injuries. Her character calls into question the very patriarchal system that functions as the social glue of Israelite society, but the narrative does not explore what consequence this may have, since the story instead allows a male plot line to take over as "all Israel" avenges the affront to the Levite. In the final scenes of the story, the young women of Shiloh are

abducted and taken as wives to the Benjaminites. The story of female abuse begins again. Was the woman's life pointless? Were her acts of transgression insignificant? The reader is not allowed to get too close to her character, and we get the sense that if we were to come any closer, we might not like what we see.

We may keep a safe narrative distance from the woman, but like the Levite, she is still eerily familiar. We recognize the signs of abuse. We have met her before, we have seen her bruises, avoided her blank stare. We choose not to come too close because her life is a mess. Her relationships are toxic. We may not know her name, we may never hear her utter a word, but she is all too familiar.

Gibeahites: Perpetrator or Victim?

The Gibeahites are a frightening collective character that threatens the safety of the Levite, his servant, and his woman when they seek a night of shelter in Gibeahite territory. Although the Gibeahites are never geographically out-of-place, they represent a clear danger to the traveling trio because they violate bodily boundaries, the very visceral skin-based boundary between them and the Levite. They threaten to penetrate, leak semen, and contaminate the Levite. When they are not successful in acquiring the Levite and rape the woman instead, they contaminate the woman, reducing her value to little more than body parts. The Gibeahite men come too close to the guests, invading their personal space, oozing and polluting them. Ahmed writes, "The very habits and gestures of marking out bodily space involve differentiating 'others' into familiar (assimilable, touchable) and strange (unassimilable, untouchable)."[29] The manner of touch that the

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[29] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 100.

Gibeahites perpetrate renders the Levite and his woman unassimilable in Gibeah, but it also renders the Gibeahites themselves as unassimilable with the rest of Israel.

The reaction of "all Israel" to the Gibeahite crime (and Benjaminites more generally) reflects the estrangement of the Gibeahites from the rest of the Israelites. The tribes rise up against the tribe of Benjamin (of which Gibeah is a member), resorting to hostility as they kill all but 600 Benjaminites. The swords of "all Israel" now penetrate the Benjaminite bodies, tit for tat. The Gibeahites are pushed to the very edge of the Israelite community, teetering perilously on the boundary between insiders and outsiders.

Are the Gibeahites even on the reader's radar as a people who are brutally slaughtered? The gang rape of the woman makes it easy to see the Gibeahites as monsters, but are they deserving of near complete annihilation? Should *all* the Gibeahites be held responsible? Should the whole tribe of Benjamin be culpable? Is this level of destruction necessary? We briefly glimpse the violence perpetrated against the woman, but Gibeahite and Benjaminite blood spills all over the page and we barely flinch. Davidson argues that, "Despite his almost excessive attention to the details of slaughter, the author himself does not mention pain or suffering or bloodshed, keeping the reader in a state of denial and ignorance."[30]

What happens if we begin to imagine what the violence might have looked like? What would they do with the bodies? How would the Benjaminite community manage day-to-day survival tasks without the labor of all the deceased men (farming, caring for animals, developing infrastructure, etc.), to say nothing of the mechanics of the perpetuation of the community? The reader has to work overtime to muster up some

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[30] Davidson, "The Comedy of Horrors," 39.

sympathy for the Gibeahites and Benjaminites because we are alienated from the violence and its repercussions.

Distancing the reader or viewer from the brutality of a situation is a common strategy (even in the contemporary media) for allowing the reader to be informed, but complacent. We do not know the Gibeahites, but we sense that they deserve the violence they experience. Justified violence does not elicit a strong moral response. Shielded from the bloodied corpses, we are not confronted with any of the more complex issues of retributive justice.

"All Israel": A Failed Community?

The Israelites, as a collective character, emerge relatively late in the story. Their receipt of the woman's body parts summons them from their homes ("all the Israelites came out, from Dan to Beer-sheba, including the land of Gilead" (Judg 20:1)). After hearing about the "crimes" as reported by the Levite, "all the people got up as one"–unanimously–and decide together, "'We will not any of us go to our tents, nor will any of us return to our houses'" (Judg 20:8).[31] Incredibly, if we take the narrative at face value, we are to believe that all of Israel has voluntarily left their homes upon receipt of the woman's limb, and consequently *all Israel* vows not to return until they have avenged "the crime." Everyone in Israel is physically displaced.

We also begin to see how "all Israel" is out-of-place, as a "failed community," to use Ahmed's term. Up to this point, the story has featured many personal relationships

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[31] The phrase "as one person" occurs only nine times in the Hebrew Bible, and four of those instances are in the book of Judges (Judg 6:16; 20:1, 8, 11). This story seems particularly invested in portraying Israel as moving and acting with the resolve of "one person," which seems ironic since they are hardly a united people.

(husband and wife, traveler and host, father-in-law and son-in-law, individual and tribe).

Each relationship is fraught with discord and dysfunction. The father-in-law manipulates

the Levite. The Levite must bait a fellow Ephraimite for lodging.[32] The Levite uses a

dismembered corpse for intertribal communication. Scholars such as Niditch, Gordon

Oeste, and Marvin Sweeney have argued that civil war is the final indicator that Israelite

social structures have completely broken down. Niditch argues that the disintegration of

kinship relationships happens at the level of the household, clan, tribe, and finally the

whole people of Israel.[33] Oeste argues that the disintegration of Israel's social structure in

Judges is the direct result of the degeneration of kinship structures throughout Judges.[34]

In a similar vein, Sweeney argues that the deterioration of Israelite society is due in large

part to Israel's inability to expel the Canaanites from the land, and the intermarriage that

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[32] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 72. Trible argues that the Levite adds two ingratiating flourishes in order to improve his chances of gaining the man's hospitality. First, the Levite offers his concubine to the man (referring to her as "your [the old man's] maidservant" 19:19), and then he demeans himself by referring to himself as "your servant," resorting to flattery to gain hospitality.

[33] Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19-20"; O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*; Gale A. Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 138–160. Niditch writes that Judges 19-20 is about community, relationships, and tribal unity. She sets these themes in the context of the tribal confederation (lending support to Martin Noth's amphictyony hypothesis). Niditch argues that a unified "all-Israel" is the ideal that stands behind the story of the Levite. She sees Judges 19-20 as "a model for the league, an example of how it should work" (374). Her argument is that the disunity of the pre-monarchic tribes in the story is precisely the *raison d'etre* for the story. The story illustrates that when a member of the league does not uphold the values of the league, holy war is permissible. By this logic, the failure to obliterate Benjamin represents a failure of the tribal league to perform the necessary actions to keep the integrity of the league. That the whole narrative starts with personal, familial relationships points again to the unified "all-Israel" ideal. When personal and familial relationships do not uphold the league's values of hospitality, care, and loyalty, social and political disintegration is risked. Robert O'Connell comes to similar conclusions as Niditch, but argues that it is not so much that intertribal unity that is the narrator's main concern, but intertribal conformity to the ideal of covenantal justice. O'Connell argues that the social and political disintegration at the conclusion of the book point to a failure of the tribal league to enforce covenantal justice (evident by the failure of the league to obliterate Benjamin) and therefore implicit in the references to the monarchy at the conclusion of the book is the endorsement of Israel's king as the agent of Judges' desired higher standards of cultic and social order in Israel. Gale Yee contextualizes the social chaos of Judges 17-21 to the time of King Josiah, arguing that the stories are a literary production of the preexilic Deuteronomist to support Josiah's reforms and disrupt tribal bonds to instill loyalty to the monarchy.

[34] Gordon K. Oeste, "Butchered Brothers and Betrayed Families: Degenerating Kinship Structures in the Book of Judges," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35, no. 3 (March 1, 2011): 297.

ensued.[35] Each of these scholars agrees that it is the relaxation of social boundaries enclosing the Israelite community that lead to the disintegration of Israel's social structure.

The social disintegration of the Israelite society is indicative of a failed community. Failed communities have poorly established and enforced boundaries so that neighbors are mistaken and treated as strangers. Individuals and groups, who would be otherwise identified not only as neighbors, but also as kin, are treated as strangers who pose an immediate and direct threat to the community. For example, when the Levite's concubine balks at the patriarchal authority of her Levite husband and takes off on her own for Bethlehem, she draws attention to a significant social system that serves as the basic social "glue" that adheres individuals at the most nuclear level. Her act of boldness against patriarchal authority is met with extreme violence, which shows the extraordinary dysfunction of Israelite society.[36] This leads to a social world where it is difficult for individuals to move and act in social spaces without feeling threatened by others. Neighbors are treated as strangers.

This results in the disintegration of the *habitus* of the community. In other words, one's position in the community is no longer clear, and therefore appropriate speech, action, and dress relative to one's position in the community are also more difficult to gauge. The basic values and principles of the community are obscured. The ways of acting, being, speaking, and moving are unclear, making the bounds between permissible and criminal behavior blurred.

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[35] Marvin A. Sweeney, "Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges," *Vetus Testamentum* 47 (1997): 527.

[36] Ng, "Revisiting Judges 19."

We see this in Judges 19-21 when there is no clear articulation, by any character or entity, of what constitutes the heinous crime that instigates the civil war. When the Levite summons all of Israel together with the detached limbs of his woman, he asks "Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day?" (Judg 19:30, NRSV). *What happened*? To what crime does the Levite refer? His potential rape? The rape of his woman? The murder of the woman? Her dismemberment?

As the story unfolds, it is evident that the Israelite community is horrified (receiving a dismembered limb by courier has that effect). But, the reason for their outrage is never made clear. At the beginning of Judges 20, the community assembles in Mizpah, and they ask the Levite "Tell, us how did this criminal act come about?" (Judg 20:3, NRSV). *Which criminal act?* So, the Levite tells his story, but changes several key events. He says:

> 'I came to Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night. The lords of Gibeah rose up against me, and surrounded the house at night. They intended to kill me, and they raped my concubine until she died. Then I took my concubine and cut her into pieces, and sent her throughout the whole extent of Israel's territory; for they have committed a vile outrage in Israel. So now, you Israelites, all of you, give your advice and counsel here. (Judg 20:4-7, NRSV).

His story indicates that the Gibeahites intended to kill him, when in fact they intended to rape him. He also says that the men raped his concubine and she died but the reader knows that the story is more complicated than that. The concubine returned to the home of the Ephraimite host alive. Did she die as a result of the rape or did she die after that, at the hand of the Levite? He also neglects to mention that he gave his concubine to the Gibeahites in order preserve himself. No where in his explanation of the criminal events does the Levite indicate what, precisely, he needs advice about. Was it the threat

to his safety that was most disconcerting? The rape? The death of the concubine? His

decision to dismember her?

Once the Israelites hear the Levite's story, they decide *unanimously* ("All the

people got up as one" Judg 20:8) to go to war against Benjamin to "repay Gibeah of

Benjamin for all the disgrace that they have done in Israel" (Judg 20:10).[37] Again, what

disgrace?[38] The treatment of the Levite? The treatment of the concubine? The lack of

hospitality provided to the traveling trio? Or, is it all of these things together? Is the

offense that this could happen to anyone? Or that it happened to the Levite specifically?

What constitutes the great "disgrace"?

The sense that the community is not exactly sure what constitutes the crime

persists as the tribes of Israel send couriers through the tribe of Benjamin asking, "'What

crime is this that has been committed among you? Now then, hand over those scoundrels

in Gibeah, so that we may put them to death, and purge the evil from Israel'" (Judg

20:12-13, NRSV). At a loss to identify a particular crime, or a particular criminal, the

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[37] Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19-20"; O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*. Niditch writes that Judges 19-20 is about community, relationships, and tribal unity. She sets these themes in the context of the tribal confederation (lending support to Martin Noth's amphictyony hypothesis). Niditch writes that a unified "all-Israel" is the ideal that stands behind the story of the Levite. She argues that Judges 19-20 is "a model for the league, an example of how it should work" (374). Her argument is that the disunity of the pre-monarchic tribes in the story is precisely the *raison d'etre* for the story. The story illustrates that when a member of the league does not uphold the values of the league, holy war is permissible. By this logic, the failure to obliterate Benjamin represents a failure of the tribal league to perform the necessary actions to keep the integrity of the league. That the whole narrative starts with personal, familial relationships points again to the unified "all-Israel" ideal. When personal and familial relationships do not uphold the league's values of hospitality, care, and loyalty, social and political disintegration is risked. O'Connell comes to similar conclusions as Niditch, but argues that it is not so much that intertribal unity that is the narrator's main concern, but intertribal conformity to the ideal of covenantal justice. O'Connell argues that the social and political disintegration at the conclusion of the book point to a failure of the tribal league to enforce covenantal justice (evident by the failure of the league to obliterate Benjamin) and therefore implicit in the references to the monarchy at the conclusion of the book is the endorsement of Israel's king as the agent of Judges' desired higher standards of cultic and social order in Israel.

[38] Barry Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 191. Webb draws attention to the ambiguity of the language for the crime ("such a thing as this," Judg 19:30).

tribes of Israel ask the offending tribe to describe the crime and turn in the offenders themselves! We are at an even greater loss to know precisely what crime warrants such a "purge" from Israel when we consider the abduction of the women at Shiloh at the end of the book (Judg 21:15-25). Here, it seems permissible (even recommended) to abduct a woman and have sex with her. If the act of taking the Levite's concubine and raping her was, in fact, the crime that is so vehemently opposed, what exactly did the civil war "purge"? Certainly the civil war did not achieve prohibitions against abducting or raping women.

The inability to determine the precise crime that precipitated the descent into civil war is indicative of the communal struggle to define Israel's place in its geographic and social world. Without the clear definition of physical, social, and bodily space, the *habitus* of the people begins to dissolve. What appears as a crime to one is little more than customary treatment of strangers to another. There is no agreement about what constitutes acceptable behavior, and therefore the Israelites do not need a reason to obliterate a whole tribe. The impulse to jump directly to the complete annihilation of an entire people is hardly the approach taken to a group of people understood as neighbors or kin. The Gibeahites, and the Benjaminites more generally, are so foreign to the rest of the community that there is no pause to consider a more judicious, less violent solution.

If accusing the Benjaminites of some unspoken heinous crime did not estrange them enough, the Benjaminites are completely "othered" when the Israelites vow not to allow their daughters to marry into the tribe of Benjamin (21:1). This vow effectively establishes a new social boundary that communicates, "people like us cannot touch people like you." It seems that Benjaminite bodies are too threatening, too leaky, and too

violent to be trusted. Even so, the vow seems extreme. It annihilates an entire tribe of fellow Israelites.

Feeling remorse for the excision of an entire tribe, the Israelites try to find a way around the vow. They discover that no one from Jabesh-gilead was at Mizpah the day the oath was uttered. Therefore, the women of Jabesh-gilead could be married off to Benjaminite men without violating the vow. The men, married women, and male children of Jabesh-gilead are killed and the virgins (400 of them) are given to the Benjaminites, but "they did not suffice for them" (Judg 21:14). They were obviously insufficient in number (600 Benjaminite men remained, but only 400 virgins were delivered), but might they also be insufficient in terms of their geographic origins? Jabesh-gilead is located on the east side of the Jordan River. As David Jobling observes, part of the deep structural problem of the book is the trouble of those Israelites living outside the land of Canaan (east of the Jordan). Jobling writes, "those living in the land of Canaan, west of the Jordan, see themselves (and the narrator likely shares their perspective) as 'insiders' – definitely members of Yahweh's community. Non-Israelites they see equally as outsiders. The status of people calling themselves Israelites but living outside the land of Canaan, east of the Jordan, is anomalous – are they inside or outside?"[39] The murder of the men and the abduction of the women of Jabesh-gilead certainly does nothing to end the cycle of violence, but does it even solve the problem of rehabilitating the Benjaminite tribe? Or, does this subtly push Benjamin further to the margins of Israelite society?

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[39] David Jobling, "Structuralist Criticism: The Text's World of Meaning," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 114.

Acknowledging the problem, the Israelites soften and allow the Benjaminites to abduct the women of Shiloh to take as wives.[40] In this way, the men of Shiloh (who also swore the vow at Mizpah) are not *giving* their daughters to the Benjaminites (and breaking the vow). The Benjaminites are *abducting* and removing the women from their homes. Although the act is portrayed as an act of compassion for the Benjaminites (who would otherwise be blotted out), this is another way of reinforcing the body politic the Israelites have already foisted on the Benjaminites. Suggesting that the Benjaminites abduct the Shiloh women puts the Benjaminites in a position where they are forced to perpetuate the stereotype that they are a dangerous people who will violate anyone's personal body space in order to achieve their goals.

Is it possible that the text constructs an Israel that is a stranger even to a historical Israel itself? It is not that the community constructed at the conclusion of Judges is so unrecognizable. In fact, what is troubling is that it is *too recognizable* as precisely the kind of community we fear. As Ahmed says, the stranger is not simply someone we fail to recognize (someone we do not know), but is someone we have already recognized as not belonging.[41] Is it possible that Judges 19-21 constructs an Israel that is the ultimate stranger? Does the text construct an identity for Israel that not only fails to characterize the actual community, but also characterizes Israel in the worst possible light as the type of community that every community fears it may encounter, or may become?

At the conclusion of the story, each of the characters is simultaneously anonymous and much too familiar. On the one hand, we know very little about any of the

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[40] Trible argues that the story of the concubine justifies the expansion of violence against other women. "What these men claim to abhor, they have reenacted with vengeance," she writes. Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 83.

[41] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 21.

characters. They are anonymous and fail to conform to the expectations of the spaces in which they move in and through. But, we recognize them immediately. They are the type of people we fear may one day live next door, or worse, we may one day become. Still, we are refused any intimacy with the characters. We are not allowed to come close enough to any of them to really see or experience the violence they inflict or undergo. In this way, we are alienated from the characters and the story, as Davidson points out. Yet, we come close enough to each character to be able to fill in the gaps of their characterization from our own experience.

The alienation of the characters from the reader may be yet another response to Empire and the colonization of the Israelites. Hudson argues that the anonymity of the characters deconstructs naming, meaning, and identity. Although it renders the characters less identifiable in the story world, it also prevents Empire from creating an identity for them. As Hudson points out, the lack of names throughout the story serves to universalize the characters ("all the people did what was right in their own eyes," Judg 21:25), and while this may be the case, it also allows the Israelites to imagine a world where identities can be imagined apart from tyranny and colonization. Judges 19-21 depicts a world that is far from ideal, but by distancing the reader from characters, keeping them anonymous, unnamed, and without precise identities, the narrative invites the reader to fill in the gaps with her own imagination. The reader is free to make the characters as familiar, terrifying, strange, or sympathetic as she wishes. Israel may emerge as a stranger at the end of the book, but it is hard for Empire to control what it cannot clearly identify.

In this way, the story resists Empire in ways the previous two did not. The story does not mount a violent attack against Empire. It does not attempt an assimilation tactic. Instead, it tells a tale of Israelite self-governance. It is not a simple story. It does not end "happily ever after." But, neither does it allow Empire to call the shots, make the choices, or define the people. The ugly violence Israel perpetrates against fellow Israelites also demonstrates the great (family-sacrificing) lengths the community will go to redress what it perceives to be an injustice. Particularly if we read the "men of Gibeah" as a cipher for colonizing imperial forces, then the story could function as subversive political resistance.

Even this interpretation of the story world is too simplistic and ignores the complexity of the post-exilic situation of colonial Yehud. None of these stories gives a complete picture, or represents the final word on the context from which it arises. Rather, the text serves as a narrative space onto which a community can excise its problems, anxieties, and proposed solutions. I turn now to examine how these three texts fit into a post-exilic context, and how the text functions as a narrative space.

Chapter Six:

Conclusion

In the previous chapters, I have explored three stories from the book of Judges, each a vignette that portrays the community in a different relationship to the space it occupies, which results in different leadership strategies, community organization, and relationships with outside and neighboring people. Each story gives a decidedly different view of the Israelite community. In this concluding chapter, I look back on the three stories previously analyzed and demonstrate how each exhibits an anxiety about space in a post-exilic Persian era context. The multivalent spaces yield a community with multiple identities.

During the Persian period, the Yehudite community was being formed primarily by the external imperial expansion of the Persian Empire, not through internal organization. Jon Berquist proposes that in a post-exilic context, the purpose of Yehudite literature would be to construct a Yehudite community that fit into the imperial Persian cultural context.[1] As such, he argues that the literature of the Deuteronomistic History (which includes Judges) is not a historical memory of the Israel that once was, but that it functions as a construction of identity for the post-exilic Yehudite community.

Berquist suggests the Persian Empire was better equipped to produce such a history than the exilic community, both in terms of the literary skills required for the production of a large-scale corpus and in terms of the physical resources and infrastructure for writing and preserving it.[2] The Persian Empire would also have several

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[1] Jon L Berquist, "Identities and Empire: Historiographic Questions for the Deuteronomistic History in the Persian Period," in *Historiography and Identity (Re)formulation in Second Temple Historiographical Literature*, ed. Louis Jonker (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 11.
[2] Ibid., 6.

motives for composing such a history. Berquist identifies three literary themes that would

fit Persian interests and motives for producing the Deuteronomistic History. First, the

books explain why the Yehudites do not govern themselves. This history shows the

weakness of Israel's political leaders, and depicts a divinely supported end to the Judean

state.[3] Second, it supports Jerusalem as the center for Israelite identity, administration,

and religious functions. This centralizes imperial power in one place, where taxes could

be collected. Finally, the stories in the Deuteronomistic History show nearly all of the

leaders of Israel and Judah's past to be immoral, unjust, and unhelpful. "The

Deuteronomistic History depicts Yehudites as having a history of poor self-governance,

and can argue within an imperial context that they should not be allowed self-governance,

perhaps even for their own protection and self-interest."[4]

Seth Schwartz comes to some similar conclusions as Berquist, especially with

regard to Persian influence on Yehudite identity. Schwartz writes that the Persians tended

to support native rulers, used these oligarchies to regulate the legal and economic

activities of the province.[5] It was in the best interest of the Persians to imperially support

both the Temple and the production of "ancestral laws" and histories, which could help

support their claim to authority over the people they ruled. Therefore, the authority of the

text was not a result of the majority consensus of the people who *used* the text, but was

based on the power and might of the imperial support for the text.[6]

The social and spatial problems of Judges also reflect those of post-exilic Israel.

When the exilic community returned from Babylon, they were confronted with many of

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[3] Ibid., 7.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2009), 21.
[6] Ibid., 56.

the same complexities that we find in the book of Judges as a whole. The returning

community was faced with a reality that did not match their collective memory of the

land their ancestors had left. Other people, people who did not remember (or did not care)

about the returning community's claim to the land, now occupied the land. Not only were

there the issues of reconciling the memory of the place with the reality of the place, but

there were also the issues of finding a way to live alongside these people and locating a

place to settle in the land. All of these complex and delicate issues had to be tackled

under the watchful eye of the Persian Empire.

Casey's ideas about homecoming and homesteading help to understand the

problem that sets out the premise of the book of Judges. Imagining the story in

homecoming and homesteading terms also allows post-exilic themes to float to the

surface. When the exilic community returned from exile, they not only had to contend

with those who had been living in the land in the meantime, but also with the Persian

Empire who facilitated the return. The post-exilic period was a time of both homecoming

and homesteading, a time to learn what co-habitancy would look like, but also managing

the expectations of empire. It is an odd set of circumstances to return to one's homeland,

which is not only occupied by others (who are both connected to the returnees and

different from them), but also controlled by an outside regency.[7] Ehud's story, brief

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[7] Rainer Kessler, *The Social History of Ancient Israel: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 137–138. Kessler argues that tensions between those who remained in the land and those former upper class persons who returned can be found in the list in Ezra 2:1-67 and Nehemiah 7:8-68. He writes,

> The crucial problem lurks behind the simple observation that the exiles returned 'all to their own towns' (Ezra 2:1 par. Neh 7:6). This shows that the exiles, or their descendants, maintained an awareness, even more than half a century later, of which was 'their town.' They take it for granted that they can return to their former properties, and there is no mention at all of the fact that in the meantime two or three generations of descendants of the former lower class have settled there. The early Persian era must have experienced a profound conflict over the question of the real ownership of the land. (137).

though it may be, begins to deal with some of these complexities. The ambiguity about

geographic boundaries, and the vagueness about the description and constitution of the

Israelite community could easily reflect a post-exilic era in which none of these things

were especially clear, and border skirmishes could accomplish only so much to make

them clearer.

As a textual space, Judges 3 invites the reader into a story that seems subversive

on the surface. Ehud, an unlikely left-handed (physically disabled) warrior assassinates

the ample king of the ruling Moabite Empire (perhaps a cipher for Persia?). But in subtle

(perhaps unconscious) ways the story still pays homage to the empire. For example, the

story does not allow Israel full autonomy to proclaim its own identity. The story defines

the Israelites in negative contrast to the Moabites as non-Moabite. Even if we allow the

story to identify the Israelites positively (as clever ambushers, or as an unbeatable, if ad

hoc, army), this is in contrast to the Moabites who would be provincial competitors to

Yehud. We should be cautious about reading the story as a clear victory for Israel

because Israelite identity is still dependent on Moabite identity at the end of the story.

The risk with every co-habitancy situation is that the involved communities will

need to change. The Israelites must find a way to live in close proximity to the Moabites

while maintaining their own identity. Co-habitancy requires that each community must be

open to the possibility that the shared place will change and that the contours of the

community will also change. There is an inherent risk in co-habitancy that the community

will change and morph into something no longer recognizable. The only thing more

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Kessler goes on to suggest that Zechariah 5:1-4 may subtly reference claims to home ownership obtained by false oaths or stealing. He cites Leviticus 25 and the provision about returning property after fifty years as a reference to the fifty years of exile, corresponding roughly to the period between 587 and 537 BCE, suggesting that the property should be given back to the returnees (138).

frightening than being placeless might be being in a place where you cannot recognize yourself.

This spatial reading of Ehud's story leaves open the possibility of place-alienation. Casey defines place-alienation as being beside oneself. It is the sensation one has when, although one is clearly in a place (a particular set of coordinates, a geographic location), it is not *one's own* place. They do not belong. We see place-alienation in a subtle way in Ehud's tale. Aside from the enigmatic stones that suggest markers on Ehud's journey, there are no Israelite built spaces mentioned in Ehud's story, which suggests that there are no systematic structures around which Israel can organize itself.

Of course, it is precisely this place-alienation that makes Ehud's scheme successful. Lack of centralization makes Israel more difficult to control and manipulate. Ehud could hatch and deploy his assassination plot without the consent of the rest of the Israelites precisely because there were not centralized systems or structures through which he was expected to work. Lack of centralized places means lack of unified identity, which may be a post-exilic survival technique that guarantees a degree of "slipperiness" around Israelite identity, making Israel more difficult to control and allowing Israel space for resistance. Even so, a people cannot remain permanently place-alienated or the community will have no way to identify itself and will become completely unrecognizable.

Ehud's story is a double-edged sword. Israel achieves some independence from Moab, but remains dependent on Moab in order to identify itself. The relatively incoherent nature of Israelite society, without strictures or structures to define it, makes Israel a more challenging people to colonize, but also risks dissolving their identity as a

people. The story illustrates the complex risks and challenges of living in such close

proximity to empire. Ehud's leadership offers one possibility under such circumstances:

an unlikely and unexpected hero who acts as a lone-ranger on behalf of his people.

Samson's story represents yet another approach to the problems faced by post-

exilic Yehud. The high degree of mobility of Samson would resonate with a post-exilic

context in which the exilic community has returned back to the land of Israel. Samson is

a Danite, the tribe known for moving from the southern part of Israel to the far north.[8]

Dan is also the location of Jeroboam's shrine, which is infamous in Deuteronomic

literature. Within the book of Judges, Dan is also implicated in destroying an otherwise

peaceful city in Judges 17-18. Samson descends from a tribe that is not only more mobile

than most other tribes, but also whose morality is more questionable as it disrupts cultic

practices, ethnic boundaries, and communal relationships. Could the highly mobile

Danites, from which Samson descends, be analogous to the returning exilic community,

or perhaps the Samaritans who become the nemesis of Yehud? Narrative anxiety about

the threat posed by highly mobile groups of people would be justified in a post-exilic

context.

Furthermore, Samson epitomizes an adolescent Israel. As Stephen M. Wilson

argues, Samson never quite grows up. He does not father children, and never successfully

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[8] Hermann Michael Niemann, "Zorah, Eshtaol, Beth Shemesh and Dan's Migration to the South: A Region and Its Traditions in the Late Bronze Age and Iron Ages," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 86 (1999): 33. Niemann actually suggests an opposite movement: that the Danites started in the north and subsequently moved south. He supports this by suggesting that the literarily late texts (i.e. Judg 1:34-35 and Judges 17-18) put the Danites in the south while the earlier texts (i.e. Judg 5:17) put the Danites in the north. He suggests that the story of the Danites migrating from the south to the north functions only as a legitimizing story for the historically more likely emigration from the north into the south. The legitimizing story of their move toward the north functions to justify their *actual* migration to the south. My point does not hinge on whether or not the Danites migrated north or south; rather Niemann's argument makes my point that mobility threatens order. That the Danites would need a legitimizing story to make their claim in the land speaks to the fact that the movement of a group from one place to another disrupts a sense of stability and predictability.

marries. He never outgrows the impulsivity of childhood. He has no adult male role

models. Samson never fully arrives as an adult male. This parallels Israel's situation in

the story. Wilson writes,

> It is precisely in his inability to cross the border into maturity once and for all that Samson most resembles Israel in the period of the judges. The first becomes evident when one considers the cyclical pattern of Israelite history running through Judges, wherein Israel does evil in the eyes of the Lord, is punished by being given into the hands of the enemy, and cries out to YHWH, who sends a deliverer to free the people and bring a period of peace. The repetition of this pattern–recurring in six completed cycles in the textual block of Judg 3:7-16:31– illustrates Israel's inability to escape the destructive cycle of behaviors that keeps the nation stuck in a state of weakness and vulnerability to external powers. Samson's familiar failure to transition out of his liminal status caught between boyhood and manhood metaphorically corresponds to Israel's repetition of this pattern and prevents the nation from maturing politically.[9]

This also fits Israel's historical post-exilic situation, particularly if we identify

Samson's character with the returning exilic community. Having just returned from exile,

the former aristocracy of Israel experiences a surge of political and social power, but not

complete autonomy. The situation is analogous to adolescence, in which children linger

between childhood and the dependency on adults and adulthood and the freedom to make

decisions.[10]

And what about the Philistines? Could the Philistines be read as a cipher for other

colonizing forces (the Persians, perhaps?) whose sheer power and mobility threatens the

established order of Israelite space? The Philistines (known as the Sea Peoples), like the

Israelites, are also immigrants from outside the Levant. Elizabeth Bloch-Smith writes that

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[9] Stephen Wilson, "Samson the Man-Child: Failing to Come of Age in the Deuteronomistic History," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 1 (April 1, 2014): 58.

[10] Ibid., 60. Wilson presumes a pre-exilic dating of the text. He assumes the Dtr historian is supportive of the Davidic monarchy, and that the work of this historian was subsequently updated. He writes, "For this first edition of the Dtr History, the hope attached to the Davidic monarchy had not met with the disappointments of defeat and exile; therefore, the story of David's coming-of-age functioned as an effective model for Israel's coming into its own as a nation." While I find Wilson's literary analysis of Samson as a liminal man-child quite compelling, I think the story is a stronger fit in a later historical context.

while it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish between Israelite and Canaanite material

remains, there are clear material differences between Israelite and Philistine remains, due

in large part to the fact that the Philistines hail from Mycenaean and (distant) Aegean

origins.[11] Israel Finkelstein agrees that the Philistines constitute a cultural border with

Israel, through which Greek (and sometimes Egyptian) ideas emerge.[12] The Philistines

bring everything from different pottery wares to advanced metallurgy techniques foreign

to Israelite culture. Even if the physical geographical borders between Israel and Philistia

are porous, the cultural boundaries are starker. Moreover, as a sea-faring people, the

Philistines were also equipped to battle from ships.[13] Not only do the Philistines represent

a foreign imperial threat, but they are also a highly mobile military people.

If we consider the possibility that the Philistines could be read as a cipher for

Persian forces alongside Seth Schwartz's thesis that the Persians were prone to creating

whole peoples,[14] including their central institutions, then what effect does Samson's

border crossing into Philistine territory have? Particularly if Samson's character is

viewed as a thinly veiled reference to leadership from the returning community, which

were upper class persons, such as priests, political leaders, and temple staff (who were

supported by the emperors and in return offered obedience), the narrative demonstrates

the dangers of (literally) sleeping with the colonizer. If we read Samson's character as a

spoof on the leadership from the returning community, then his (failed) nazirite status is a

way of comically exaggerating the role of the priest. His love-hate relationship with the

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[11] Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, "Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I: Archaeology Preserves What Is Remembered and What Is Forgotten in Israel's History," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 3 (October 1, 2003): 413.

[12] Israel Finkelstein, "The Philistines in the Bible: A Late-Monarchic Perspective," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27 (2002): 156.

[13] Bloch-Smith, "Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I," 417.

[14] Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 21.

Philistines is a carnivalesque rendering of the dance between the colonizer and the leadership of the colonized.

In contrast to Ehud who seems like an unlikely leader that emerges from below, Samson is a divinely chosen, physically powerful character with the possibility of some social clout due to his nazirite status. Unfortunately, this model of leadership and relationship to empire is not any more straightforward than it is in Ehud's story. Developing predictable geographic and social boundaries between colonized and colonizer is still challenging. There is a constant threat of losing Samson to the Philistines, which may be analogous to a fear of losing Israelite identity to the pervasiveness of the Persian Empire.

Bearing all of this in mind, is the story in Judges 19-21, with its final sentiment, "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (21:25, NRSV), an imperially supported story that intentionally ends the book of Judges with social dissolution of Israelite society? Judges 19-21 spins a story in which family and kinship ties are frayed and fraught. The basic systems and social processes that give order and predictability to daily life are transgressed and disregarded. Social spaces are muddled and disordered, and geographic spaces have none of the finitudes of secure boundaries. Hospitality cannot be taken for granted. Horrific violence is perpetrated between fellow Israelites. Rape, murder, dismemberment, civil war, annihilation are not only possible responses, but realities.

The Israelites are constructed as monstrous people who have very little impulse control and who cannot manage to organize themselves into a coherent, humane, and ordered society. This construction of Israel fits the colonial context that Berquist and

Schwartz describe. Israel's identity construction in this narrative benefits empire: they are a people that *need* empire if for no other reason than for their own safety and to prevent them from completely obliterating each other.

This grisly picture of the Israelite people may not be the last word on the Israelites in the book. The text has a life beyond empire; it lives on, long after the Persian Empire has ceased to exist. Outside the watchful eye of the Persians, the literature was free to take on another set of meanings and another ideology. Although pre-imperial life is portrayed barbaric and out-of-control, and even though self-reliance is shown to be a miserable state of affairs, there may be a post-colonial underside to the text. Berquist writes that the text can function as fantasy, allowing readers an opportunity to escape their imperial existence and imagine a world in which organizing and responding to violence is an option. Even if the social world described is far from ideal, it is a world in which actions do not need to be imperially sanctioned. In a subtle, perhaps unintentional way, the text imagines a world without empire.[15]

Each of the three stories under consideration offers a different perspective on life under empire, but one thing remains constant throughout: each story offers a narrative space onto which experiences can be excised. Stories are spaces that exist outside the hum of daily life as creative spaces external to society where experiences can be relived and examined, or alternative strategies and outcomes can be explored. Of the textual space of tales and legends, de Certeau writes, "They are deployed, like games, in a space outside of and isolated from daily competition, that of the past, the marvelous, the

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[15] Berquist, "Identities and Empire: Historiographic Questions for the Deuteronomistic History in the Persian Period," 9.

original."[16] He describes the blank page as a place full of possibility and open to the creativity of the writer. The blank page is a place, unlike most other places we might experience, where there is the freedom to design and create any kind of world one wishes. De Certeau describes this space almost whimsically, "In front of his blank page, every child is already put in the position of the industrialist, the urban planner, or the Cartesian philosopher—the position of having to manage a space that is his own and distinct from all others and in which he can exercise his own will."[17]

Creators of texts are free to construct another world, separate, apart, and exterior to the present one. Texts construct alternate realities and reorder social worlds. In this way, texts are powerful spaces. They are spaces where the human mind is free to imagine other possibilities. In the space of a text, we can make our problems exterior to ourselves, so that we can examine them in new ways. We can create worlds that are ordered in new (more equitable?) ways. Textual space can be a space where human creativity and imagination can invent new, revolutionary ways of being, and relating. Texts are spaces with the power to transform societies.

As the narrative space of the text excises these spatial anxieties, it also subtly but powerfully shapes the identity of a people. Those who tell the stories shape the space of the text, but the text in turn also shapes the way in which a community thinks about itself. Story telling is one of the ways in which communities work through the trauma of migration and relocation. "The telling of stories is bound up with – touched by – the

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[16] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 23.

[17] Ibid., 134. De Certeau also writes that, "we never write on a blank page, but always on one that has already been written on" (43). In other words, our texts are not original to us, but always pieced together from other texts, written in response to, and as a result of other texts. Therefore, although texts offer an optimum amount of creativity, this is tempered with the recognition that texts are also social works.

forming of new communities" Ahmed writes. "The stories of dislocation help to relocate: they give a shape, a contour, a skin to the past itself. The past becomes presentable through a history of lost homes (*unhousings*), as a history which [*sic*] hesitates between the particular and the general, and between the local and the transnational."[18]

The Israelites' story about entering into their space provides insight into their experience of space and their identity as a people. This project investigates how the narrative's use of space contributes to Israel's identity construction. My readings of three stories from Judges foreground the geographic spaces, social spaces, and bodily spaces in three narratives in the book. The spaces of the story help shape the Israelite community through communal fragmentation, fluid spatial movements, and variable definitions of foreignness. The way Israel as a collective character engages with a foreign social space (a "strange" space) alienates the reader, which in turn narratively produces the Israelite community as a stranger.

Space is a dimension of our lives that we take for granted. Life without any space or place is a terrifying prospect to most human beings. Losing one's place in the world due to natural catastrophe or war constitutes a major life trauma. Being unable to locate one's self, lost in a snowstorm, or displaced in an urban jungle, can be a frightening experience. Our lives are driven by our experience of space and place. This was no less true for ancient people than it is for us today.

When we recognize that space and place are crucial to human physical, emotional, and psychological well-being, the opening verses of the book of Judges take on new meaning. Fighting the Canaanites and defining territory allotments are more than just

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[18] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 91.

border skirmishes. They betray an underlying anxiety about becoming lost in a spatial void. It is about the trauma of even entertaining the very real possibility that without a space and a place all their own, the Israelite community could easily be swallowed up, indistinguishable from any other peoples. It is this horrifying possibility that drives the book of Judges, forcing its writers to carve out a space (any space – even a textual space) to understand the implications of their own existence.

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