

# GENDER TROUBLE IN JUDGES 4?

## An Intertextual Approach to the Violent Depiction of Jael

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**Abstract:** This paper contributes to the critical gender discourse by aiming to highlight the relationship between acts of violence and the construction of maleness and femaleness in Jdg 4. After defining how to speak about violence and gender in the Bible, the presentation of Jael in Jdg 4:17–22 will be analysed through a narrative text analysis, through an inner-biblical intertextual approach and through the comparison between the commentaries on Jdg 4 and the biblical text itself. Combining the theory about violence and gender with these three analytical steps, the paper attempts to critically evaluate the effects of gender stereotyping in the discourse about violent women.

**Abstract:** Dieser Beitrag zum kritischen Geschlechterdiskurs stellt den Zusammenhang zwischen gewalttätigem Handeln und den Konstruktionen von Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit in Ri 4 in den Mittelpunkt. Nach den Definitionen von Gewalt und Geschlecht in Bezug auf biblische Texte wird die Darstellung von Jaël in Ri 4,17–22 mittels einer narratologischen Textanalyse, einem innerbiblischen intertextuellen Ansatz und durch den Vergleich mit Kommentaren zu Ri 4 erhoben. Durch die Verbindung der theoretischen Diskurse über Gewalt und Geschlecht mit diesen drei Analyseschritten versucht der Beitrag, die Wirkungen von Geschlechterstereotypisierung in der Rede über Gewalttäterinnen aufzuzeigen.

**Keywords:** Judges 4; Judges 9; Gender; Violence; Intertextuality.

### 1. Introduction

Violent actions of women do not conform to the stereotypical image of a “peaceful woman”. In the Old Testament, however, Jael (Jdg 4), the woman of Tebez (Jdg 9) and Judith exercise violence against male leaders.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the relationship between acts of violence and the construction of maleness and femaleness in Judges 4. I will do this by the example of the presentation of Jael in Judges 4 analysing the passage first through a narrative analysis (who acts and how is this presented), second, through an inner-biblical intertextual approach, comparing the story of Jael with

the woman of Tebez in Judges 9 and third, through the comparison between the commentaries on Jdg 4 and the biblical text itself. At the end I combine the results of the analyses with current studies of violence and gender. I start with the exposition of what I mean by gender and violence and how these phenomena can be analysed in biblical narrations.

## 2. Violence and Gender

The World Health Organization defines violence as follows:

“The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”<sup>1</sup>

The World report divides violence into three broad categories according to characteristics of those committing the violent act: self-directed violence, interpersonal violence and collective violence. For this paper the interpersonal violence will be relevant.

The world report also defines violence as culturally determined and this is the starting point for talking about violence in biblical texts. The understanding of violent action and the perception of violence is always culturally determined and therefore subject to cultural and historic variation.<sup>2</sup> It is thus necessary to ask in which way we can talk about “violence” in Old Testament texts. Following Gerlinde Baumann, one possible approach is to deduce from today’s perspective what shall be regarded as “violence”. From this perspective, termini and text passages are selected which are then analysed more closely.<sup>3</sup> When it comes to locating textual markers for the conceptual field of “violence” in Judges 4, I am following those Hebrew termini listed and compiled under the semantics of violence in the pertinent works, e.g. by Andreas Michel, Walter Dietrich and Moisés Mayordomo.<sup>4</sup> A central term in this context will be that of **7** with its meaning of hand, power and violence.

<sup>1</sup> Etienne G. Krug et al. (ed.), *World Report on Violence and Health*. World Health Organization, Geneva 2002, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Andrea Geier, “Gewalt” und “Geschlecht”. *Diskurse in deutschsprachiger Prosa der 1980er und 1990er Jahre*, Tübingen 2005, 1.3.23.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gerlinde Baumann, *Gottesbilder der Gewalt im Alten Testament verstehen*, Darmstadt 2006, 29.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Andreas Michel, *Gott und Gewalt gegen Kinder im Alten Testament (FAT 37)*, Tübingen 2003, 74–114. Walter Dietrich/Moisés Mayordomo, *Gewalt und Gewaltüberwindung in der Bibel*, Zürich 2005, 17–22; Fritz H. Baader, *Wortkunde der Bibel und Etymologie über die Herkunft der europäischen Sprachen*, Schönböck 2000; Moisés Mayordomo, *Wie wird Gewalt in Sprache gefasst?* *BiKi* 66 (2011) 126–128.

Regarding the category of “gender”, I refer to the position that corporeality and gender are effects of a cultural discourse. “Gender” as a whole is therefore not something that we have or that we are, but something we permanently do.<sup>5</sup> Here I follow the concept of doing gender by Judith Butler:

“Gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. [...] There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”<sup>6</sup>

In the context of the text analysis it will be necessary to explore, what role the category of “gender” plays in biblical texts and in which structures and following which interests gender is described and thus constantly newly reproduced and constructed. It is thus necessary to uncover how men and women are depicted in an account and through which lens the readers are presented with female and male protagonists.<sup>7</sup> Within textual analysis this is achieved by using the methodology of characterization as part of the narrative analysis.

Gender and violence are especially thematised in the book of Judges. The book of Judges thus talks about men killing women (e.g. Jdg 11:39; 19:25–29), but also about women killing men (Jdg 4:21; Jdg 9:53), and men killing their fellow men (e.g. Jdg 1:4–17; 3:21f.; 8:17; 12:6; 15:15; 20:44–46); it clearly shows violence in the relationship between the genders.

In the fourth chapter of the book of Judges, discourses of violence and gender meet. Judges 4 talks about a violent and bellicose conflict between Canaan and the people of Israel. Here two women, Debora and Jael, and two men, Barak and Sisera, are presented as protagonists. Those four characters are caught up in power relationships and violent settings in their own different ways. The decisive action which leads to the final victory over the enemies, is carried out by Jael in Judges 4:17–22.

### 3. Jael in Judges 4: A Narrative Analysis

Judges 4:17–22 following the NRS:

V. 17: Now Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between King Jabin of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Uta Pohl-Patalong, Gender, in: Elisabeth Gössmann et al. (ed.), *Wörterbuch der Feministischen Theologie*, Gütersloh 2002, 216–221: 218.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender trouble*, New York 1990, 25.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ilse Müllner, *Handwerkszeug der Herren? Narrative Analyse aus feministischer Sicht*, in: Erhard Gerstenberger/Ulrich Schoenborn (ed.), *Hermeneutik – sozialgeschichtlich. Kontextualität in den Bibelwissenschaften aus der Sicht (latein)amerikanischer und europäischer Exegetinnen und Exegeten (Exegese in unserer Zeit 1)*, Münster 1999, 133–147: 134.

V. 18: Jael came out to meet Sisera, and said to him, “Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; have no fear.” So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with the rug.

V. 19: Then he said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink; for I am thirsty.” So she opened the skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him/it.

V. 20: He said to her, “Stand at the entrance of the tent, and if anybody comes and asks you, ‘Is anyone here?’ say, ‘Nobody.’”

V. 21a: And Jael, wife of Heber, took the tent peg (לַיָּתֵד הָאֵהָלָה),

b and she took the hammer (הַמַּצְקָה) in her hand (יָדָהּ),

c and went softly to him

d and she drove the peg into his temple (הַקֶּרֶן),

e and it went down into the ground –

f he was lying fast asleep

g and he fainted –

h and he died.

V. 22 Then (וְהִנֵּה), as Barak came in pursuit of Sisera, Jael went out to meet him, and said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” So he went into her tent; and there (וְהִנֵּה) was Sisera lying dead, with the tent peg in his temple.

In the framework of my narrative analysis the main focus is placed on the steering of perspective, the narrative pace and the characterization.<sup>8</sup>

The camera work of the verses clearly focusses on the individual “couples”, Jael and Sisera and Jael and Barak in front of the tent and inside. The readers are taken along into the private sphere of the tent. The narrative voice directs the gaze to Jael and her preparation for the deadly assault (21a–d), then to the peg (21e), and later to Sisera (21f–h). When looking at the depiction of the dying Sisera, the narrative pace is striking: Since a deadly thrust through the most vulnerable part of the head must lead to sudden death, the time-expanding depiction, much like a slow-motion shot, takes longer than the actual event (21f–h), until it nearly comes to a complete stop when Sisera dies, and remains still. It is only when the call for attention וְהִנֵּה (“and then”) is made that the perspective changes to hunting Barak and picks up momentum again (v. 22). V. 21 is here told first in a time-covering, later in a time-expanding fashion.

Jael sets clear actions, even if they lead to a violent end. Jael takes the peg of the tent and the hammer in her hand (יָדָהּ) and uses them to commit the act of violence which contributes to the final victory over the enemies. The Hebrew term יָד (“hand”) appears six times in Judges 4 and clearly works as a key word. In the whole narrative, יָד stands for power and violence. V. 21 is the only place

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed narrative analysis of Jdg 4 see Sigrid Eder, *Wie Frauen und Männer Macht ausüben. Eine feministisch-narratologische Analyse von Ri 4* (HBS 54), Freiburg i. B. et al. 2008, 81–187.

in the text where 7<sup>9</sup> is actually used for a part of the body. Here, the meaning of 7<sup>9</sup> culminates in the form of enforcement of violence.<sup>9</sup>

The deed by the hands of Jael is narrated neither as positive nor negative nor is it commented on, assessed or even condemned by the narrator.<sup>10</sup> Judges 5:24–27 refers to the deed of Jael again. In 5:21 Jael receives a blessing.

Jael's own perception, thoughts and motivations are not made accessible in the narration. Readers however receive numerous pieces of information about the inner life of Sisera. By the manslaughter of a single man Jael takes a further step in the direction of ending the violence and sets the final point under the bellicose activities of men where many had to die as soldiers (v. 16). McCann characterizes Jael as the toughest fighter in the whole narration, as she kills the man who has subdued Israel for 20 years.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in v. 21 a female character kills a male character. This is depicted in detail through creating tension, motion sequence, the expansion of time and the increasing focus on the action of Jael. Through this mode of depiction, the violent event takes up much more space in relation to the other storylines of the narrative which endangered many more characters. In contrast to the depiction of violent events affecting collectives, the depiction of an encounter of individual characters and individual fates invites readers to move closer to the text.

#### 4. Inner-biblical Intertextual Approach: Judges 4 and Judges 9

Before analyzing the second passage in the book of Judges where a woman kills a man, I need to clarify my use of the term intertextuality. I use intertextuality in a broad way, in the meaning of the study of textual relationships and the relations among texts.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, I follow Russell Meek using intertextuality as a

<sup>9</sup> For the use of body parts in Jdg 4–5 as poetic devices on their own see Karolien Vermeulen, *Hands, Heads, and Feet. Body Parts as Poetic Device in Judges 4–5*, JBL (2017) 801–819.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Eric S. Christianson, *The Big Sleep. Strategic Ambiguity in Judges 4–5 and in Classic film noir*, BibInt 15 (2007) 519–548: 529; also Walter Groß, Richter (HThKAT), Freiburg i. B. et al. 2009, 279.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. Clinton McCann, *Judges (Int.)*, Louisville 2002, 53. Ryan Bonfiglio parallels Jael with Ehud in Jdg 3 and strengthens that “Jael is portrayed as a heroine for Israel by virtue of behaving like an Israelite hero.” Ryan P. Bonfiglio, *Choosing Sides in Judges 4–5. Rethinking Representations of Jael*, in: Athalya Brenner/Gale A. Yee (ed.), *Joshua and Judges*, Minneapolis 2013, 161–173: 170.

<sup>12</sup> See Paul R. Noble, *Esau, Tamar, and Joseph. Criteria for Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions*, VT 52 (2002) 219–252: 219.

“synchronic [reader-centered] discussion of wide-ranging intertextual relationships that necessarily precludes author-centered, diachronic studies.”<sup>13</sup>

### Judges 9:50–55 (following NRS)

V. 50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it.

V. 51 But there was a strong tower within the city, and all the men and women and all the lords of the city fled to it and shut themselves in; and they went to the roof of the tower.

V. 52 Abimelech came to the tower, and fought against it, and came near to the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire.

V. 53 But a certain/solitary<sup>14</sup> woman threw an upper millstone (פְּלֶה רֶכֶב) on Abimelech's head (רֵאשׁ), and crushed his skull (גִּלְגֵּלֶת).

V. 54 Immediately he called to the young man who carried his armor and said to him, “draw your sword and kill me, so people will not say about me, ‘A woman killed him.’” So the young man thrust him through, and he died.

V. 55 When the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they all went home.

Verses 52–53 especially show, similarly to Judges 4, a delayed and slowed-down depiction of the death of the military leader. Someone whose head has been crushed should have died instantly. But Abimelech, although fatally wounded, is still able to talk to his armour-bearer. His death thus occurs in two steps with a noticeable time lag. Through Abimelech's speech, his insider's view and his concern about dying a shameful death are clearly and distinctly expressed.

An inter-textual reading of Judges 4 and 9 shows the following common elements: In both cases, it is firstly a woman (אִשָּׁה, אִשְׁתַּ חֵבֶר), who secondly employs a tool of daily use (tent peg יֵתֵד הָאֵהָל, hammer מַקְבֵּת, millstone פְּלֶה רֶכֶב) rather than a weapon, that is unarmed and by unwarlike means, to thirdly commit a courageous isolated act for the benefit of the community which is fourthly aimed at the enemy military leader's head (temple רֶקֶה, head רֵאשׁ, skull גִּלְגֵּלֶת). Just as Jael afflicts a head wound on Sisera thus freeing Israel from a dangerous enemy, the wife of Thebez inflicts a head wound on Abimelech and thus frees the region of Sichem from a tyrannical ruler; both women implement the will of JHWH although each of them acts on her own impulse.<sup>15</sup> Jael in Judges 4 and the wife of Thebez in Judges 9 kill individual military leaders. They kill the one

<sup>13</sup> Russel L. Meek, *Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis, and Inner-Biblical Allusion. The Ethics of a Methodology*, Bib. 95 (2014) 280–291: 283.

<sup>14</sup> Janzen strengthens the singularity of the woman who drops a mill-stone upon Abimelech's head by the translation of אִשָּׁה אִחָדָה with a solitary or a lone woman. Cf. J. Gerald Janzen, *A Certain Woman in the Rhetoric of Judges 9*, JSOT 38 (1987) 33–37: 35–36.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Groß, Richter (Fn. 10) 523.

violent man so that many can live.<sup>16</sup> Their deeds serve a political purpose and are aimed at liberation from suppression.<sup>17</sup> They kill for others.

In Judges 9:53, Abimelech expresses a clear judgement of value: It is a great disgrace to be killed by a woman. That will never do! Violence and killing are clearly connected here to maleness. After this intertextual journey I come back to Judges 4 asking: Which constructions of masculinity and femininity are then depicted in Judges 4 and its commentaries?

## 5. Commentaries on Judges 4 and the Biblical Text or – Gender Trouble in Judges 4?

In Judges 4 the two army leaders Barak and Sisera are pursuing their own personal glory and are losing themselves in this process; one loses his life, the other his chance of honour. Deborah however, as a prophet and judge, fulfills her functions with eloquence and efficiency. Jael moves forward events most actively in Judges 4 and her act of violence contributes to the liberation of Israel. In his commentary on Judges, Walter Groß notes: “Sisera had found his death in her tent, Barak finds his shame there. [...] Both men have failed, both women determine events.”<sup>18</sup> Based on this characterisation of male and female characters, many scholars read Judges 4 as a so-called reverse narrative. Not only the deed of Jael, but the whole narrative is interpreted as reversing traditional gender roles. “The reversal of roles in Judge 4 is one in which the powerful (males) show weakness and the weak (females) show strength.”<sup>19</sup> When interpreting the killing

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Hans Schwegler, *Aufstieg und Fall eines Gewaltmenschen. Abimelech (Richter 9)*, in: Dieter Bauer/Angelika Meissner (ed.), *Männer weinen heimlich. Geschichten aus dem Alten Testament*, Stuttgart 1993, 47–58: 55.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry. The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges*, Chicago 1988, 20 and Marianne Grohmann/Agnethe Siquans, *Literarische Transformationen sexueller Gewalt in der Hebräischen Bibel*, *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation* 3 (2017) 157–184: 171–172.

<sup>18</sup> Groß, *Richter* (Fn. 10) 282 (translation: S. E.). Similarly Victor H. Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, (NCBiC), Cambridge 2004, 68: “In both instances the men abandon the stereotypical image of the strong and courageous leader and thereby make themselves vulnerable to be superseded or, as in Sisera’s case, eliminated entirely.”

<sup>19</sup> Johanna W. H. Bos, *Out of the Shadows. Genesis 38; Judges 4:17–22; Ruth 3, Semeia* 42 (1988) 37–67: 58. Similarly Pamela Tamarkin Reis, *Uncovering Jael and Sisera. A New Reading*, *SJOT* 19 (2005) 24–47: 46: “Instead of men as leaders in Judges 4 and 5, we see women ascendant und men fools of varying degree.” See also Judy T. Sterman, *Themes in the Deborah Narrative* (Judges 4–5), *JBQ* 39 (2011) 15–24: 23 and David J. Zucker/Moshe Reiss, *Subverting Sexuality. Manly Women; Womanly Men in Judges 4–5*, *BTB* 54 (2015) 32–37: 32.35–36. According to Hee-Sook Bae, the reversal of conventional gender portrayal in Jdg 4 reflects the absence of male leadership

of Sisera by Jael, according to this interpretation, the most significant gender dichotomy comes into effect. In relation to Sisera it is noted that the man becomes the woman, the rapist turns into a victim, the harasser becomes the harassed.<sup>20</sup> Here, Nicole Duran carries the question of violence and gender to an extreme. In her view, Jael by slaying Sisera becomes a warrior, i.e. a man. “The story strongly implies that killing itself remains male, even when women do it.”<sup>21</sup>

The Jael-Sisera episode counts among the most challenging text passages when it comes to traditional, and even current, gender roles.<sup>22</sup> However, if we were to interpret it as a reversal of gender roles, these attributions would have to be previously constructed – such as in the example of Judges 4 men as strong and women as weak.

It may be that reading the narrative as a role reversal actually strengthens one-sided gender roles. In my opinion, understanding the story as a reversal perpetuates gender stereotyping. That is to say, the fundamental gender dichotomy remains unaffected and thus does not go beyond the conventional understanding of gender dualism.<sup>23</sup> Or to say it with Deryn Guest: “The terminology of gender reversal reinforces the two-sex, two-gender binary of male/female and masculine/feminine.”<sup>24</sup>

When interpreting the Jael-Sisera episode, the different expectations and evaluations of violent actions by men and women against a backdrop of traditional attributions to women as peaceful and men as aggressive and violent become apparent. It is thus possible to find behind the commentaries on Judges 4 traditional classic constructions of femininity and masculinity. The irritations caused by the text are apparently not remotely linked to the fact that violent behavior does not pose a contradiction to traditional concept of masculinity, but does contravene traditional concepts of femininity.<sup>25</sup> Or, to put it differently:

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in Israel. Cf. Hee-Sook Bae, *Reconsidering Barak’s Response in Judges 4*, Bib. 98 (2017) 504–519: 517.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Gale A. Yee, *By the Hand of a Woman. The Metaphor of the Woman Warrior in Judges 4*, *Semeia* 61 (1993) 99–132: 116; Grohmann/Siquans, *Transformationen* (Fn. 17) 167 and Susan Niditch, *Judges. A Commentary (OTL)*, Louisville 2008, 67: “She who is expected to be weak turns the male warrior into the woman raped.”

<sup>21</sup> Nicole Duran, *Having Men for Dinner. Deadly Banquets and Biblical Women*, *BTB* 35 (2005) 117–124: 119.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Duran, *Men* (Fn. 21) 123.

<sup>23</sup> See also Deryn Guest, *From Gender Reversal to Genderfuck. Reading Jael through a Lesbian Lens*, in: Teresa J. Hornsby/Ken Stone (ed.), *Bible Trouble. Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship (SemeiaSt 67)*, Atlanta 2011, 9–43: 31.

<sup>24</sup> Guest, *Gender Reversal* (Fn. 23) 9.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Andrea Lehner-Hartmann, *Die alltägliche Gewalt gegen Frauen und Kinder. Vom Kavaliersdelikt zum sozialen Problem*, *ThPQ* (2005) 138–148: 141.



Women as perpetrators, women who torture and kill cause equal confusion for social, cultural and military gender images. Women who exert physical violence seem particularly terrifying and cruel.<sup>26</sup> And this brings us to the current controversial discourse about women committing acts of violence.

## 6. Women, Men and Violence: Judges 4, Judges 9 and the Current Discourse About Violence and Gender

Violence is still seen by society as a largely “male” conflict resolution behaviour or as an expression of aggressive potential which women have been taught to suppress or seen as naturally lacking because it is seen in clear opposition with attributes of “femininity”.<sup>27</sup> A critical examination of the Jael-Sisera episode has clearly shown and questioned gender specific codes. For example, traditional interpretations are not uncomfortable with the fact that Sisera violently attacks Israel or that a whole military host perishes in battle. Male violence in this context is not subject to scandal. In contrast, the deed of Jael in its pragmatism causes huge irritation, as the discussion usually uses the gender discourse as its primary interpretative filter. This is also in line with more recent studies within gender studies about women who are hitting headlines in world politics through acts of violence. “When a woman commits an act of violence, her sex is the lens through which all of her actions are seen and understood.”<sup>28</sup> Here, the gender of the person is the first and foremost focus. Femininity is thus prominently discussed, which is not the case if men commit acts of violence.<sup>29</sup> As a consequence, any attempts of interpretation for violent acts by men and women are fundamentally different and subject to gender dichotomy. While violence of women runs contrary to the stereotypical understanding of what it is to be a woman, violence by men forms an intrinsic part of their male habitus. “A woman’s violence is a *sexual* event; women who are violent are highlighted, exploited and fetishized. [...] discussions of women’s violence *debase* women and reduce them to their sexuality.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Bettina Engels/Franziska Fürst, Militär und Geschlechterkonstruktionen. Zur Rolle von Frauen und Männern in den Streitkräften, *Schlangenbrut* 88 (2005) 25–28: 27.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Geier, “Gewalt” (Fn. 2) 2.

<sup>28</sup> Alice Myers/Sarah Wight, Introduction, in: Alice Myers/Sarah Wight (ed.), *No Angels. Women Who Commit Violence*, London 1996, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Laura Sjoberg/Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores. Women’s Violence in Global Politics*, London et al. 2007, 7.29.41–42: “When men do bad things, it is because there is something evil about them; when women do bad things, their evil is sexualized.”

<sup>30</sup> Sjoberg/Gentry, *Mothers* (Fn. 29) 46.

When Jael is therefore turned into a man in some exegetic discourses, her act of violence also attains a male connotation. Maintaining the traditional order, she thus fits into the traditional patterns of masculinity which is accredited with dominance, strength and superiority. This helps to cover up the critical potential of the text. Such classic patterns of masculinity can also be seen in the depiction of the circumstances surrounding the death of Abimelech in Judges 9:54. In order to not be killed by a woman, Abimelech demands to be slain by a young man. Abimelech saves his honour because his armour bearer dealt the deadly blow. The traditional form of masculinity, as it is expressed primarily through the character of the self-indulging despot<sup>31</sup> Abimelech, can be restored in this way. Here, injuries and violence afflicted by men are an intrinsic part of this world, but being inferior to a woman is definitely not.<sup>32</sup>

According to German sociologist Michael Meuser the acts of violence committed by men serve amongst other things as a reassurance of a traditional understanding of masculinity. In this context, male violence is the – risky and highly dangerous – expression of an authentic experience of corporeality and masculinity. But violence by men towards their fellow men is very different from violence against women. A man who is defeated in a violent conflict may sustain grave physical injuries and pain, but this does not necessarily mean that the person also suffers degradation.<sup>33</sup> It may even be that this injury can be shown with some pride as a proof of masculinity. In contrast, a woman who has been beaten cannot use these injuries as a means to strengthen her identity, but instead bears these injuries as clear sign of degradation.<sup>34</sup> Thus, women are – due to a persisting structural inequality – both involved in violence and also affected by it in a very different way compared to men.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, *Erzählte Welten im Richterbuch. Narratologische Aspekte eines polyfonden Diskurses*, Leiden et al. 2013, 132.

<sup>32</sup> See Grohmann/Siquans, *Transformationen* (Fn. 17) 172: “[...] Zielperspektive aller dieser Texte [Jdg 4–5; Jdg 9] ist die Wiederherstellung der verlorenen Machtposition, die durch die Männer repräsentiert wird. Es findet in diesen Texten keine grundsätzliche und nachhaltige Transformation von Geschlechterverhältnissen oder auch von Gewalt statt.”

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Michael Meuser, “Doing Masculinity” – Zur Geschlechterlogik männlichen Gewalthandelns, in: Regina-Maria Dackweiler/Reinhild Schäfer (ed.), *Gewalt-Verhältnisse. Feministische Perspektiven auf Geschlecht und Gewalt*, Frankfurt 2002, 53–78: 67–68.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Lehner-Hartmann, *Gewalt* (Fn. 25) 141 and Ruth Seifert, *Krieg und Vergewaltigung. Ansätze zu einer Analyse*, in: Alexandra Stiglmayer (ed.), *Massenvergewaltigung. Krieg gegen die Frauen*, Freiburg i. B. 1993, 85–108: 87.

If, then, women commit violence, they are usually categorized as “bad women”. “Established gender norms portray women as naturally nurturing, emotionally sensitive and domesticated.”<sup>35</sup> Violent women are thus characterised as “un-feminine” and “non-women”, even “inhuman”.<sup>36</sup>

## 7. Insights and Perspectives

I started with the narrative analysis of Judges 4:17–22. The inner-biblical intertextual reference to Judges 9:50–55 showed a clear concept of masculinity in which men are connected with violence and killing but not women. Some commentaries on Judges 4 do not break with the traditional expectations of women as peaceful and men as violent and thus fix gender-stereotypes. In Judges 4 there is – in my point of view – no clear concept of femininity and masculinity. Or to put it differently: It is the character of Jael “who breaks the borders between male and female”.<sup>37</sup> So, what can be learned from this intertextual journey to Judges 4 and 9 in connection to current analyses of violence and gender?

Stereotypical images of femininity and masculinity obstruct a differentiated approach to the problem of violence. The account of Judges 4 in its non-conformity with traditional perceptions of being a woman and being a man offers a high potential for irritation. This potential can – in connection with discourses of current gender research – open up new horizons of thought.

The biblical stories in the book of Judges relating to male and female violence can serve to better perceive today’s complicated connections between violence and gender constructions. The mentioned biblical texts can also help us re-think our own concepts of masculinity and femininity. The account of Judges 4 breaks away from the myth of the peaceful woman.<sup>38</sup> By showing that women can act powerfully and commit violence like men, that men and women are equally capable of killing, that women like men suffer from violence, maybe Judges 4 can

<sup>35</sup> Sjoberg/Gentry, *Mothers* (Fn. 29) 7.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Sjoberg/Gentry, *Mothers* (Fn. 29) 11.

<sup>37</sup> Guest, *Gender Reversal* (Fn. 23) 31.

<sup>38</sup> “Die Texte, die gewalttätige Frauen präsentieren, machen es unmöglich, auf dem Vorurteil zu beharren, dass Frauen friedfertiger wären als Männer.” Ilse Müllner, *Gewalt im Hause Davids. Die Erzählung von Tamar und Amnon* (2 Sam 13,1–22) (HBS 13), Freiburg i. B. et al. 1997, 7. Similarly Silvia Schroer, *Gott – gewalttätig? Frauen und die Gewaltfrage im Ersten Testament*, in: *KatBl* 119 (1994) 676–686: 684: “Wir können nicht davon ausgehen, dass Frauen von Natur aus friedfertiger sind als Männer (oder Göttinnen friedfertiger als Götter). Die biblischen Traditionen dokumentieren vielmehr, wie Frauen von Kultur aus auf bestimmte Werte und Verhaltensweisen in Konfliktsituationen hin sozialisiert und delegiert werden.”

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contribute to questioning and dissolving any type of gender stereotyping. This could help us move forward and beyond traditional gender boundaries.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See also Grohmann/Siquans, Transformationen (Fn. 17) 172: “Diese Gegenstimmen [Jdg 4–5; Jdg 9] eröffnen Rezipientinnen und Rezipienten die Möglichkeit, die Verhältnisse auch anders zu denken, und bieten damit einen Anhaltspunkt für ein Hinterfragen und eine Transformation der Geschlechter- und Machtverhältnisse.”