

**Striking Family Hierarchies:
Luke 12:35-48, Gender, and Slavery¹
Marianne Bjelland Kartzow
University of Oslo**

Introduction

As Shane Butler has remarked, slaves are only footnotes in great men's biographies.² In a slave-holding culture, family values are only for free persons.³ Our interest in "family as strategy" in antiquity has much to benefit from taking into account how roles and functions in the family were determined by class, age, and gender, and how slaves belonged to a different discursive reality in the households than free persons.

In her book *Slaves and Other Objects*, Page DuBois treats "the occultation of slavery in the presentation of objects in various institutions of classical studies," arguing that "everyday life" of antiquity is presented without paying attention to slaves.⁴ DuBois examines some museum exhibitions with objects from antiquity, showing that slaves are made invisible. Although slaves were ubiquitous, and production, reproduction, and ideal family life would be impossible without them, their contribution is not part of what is remembered from the past.

The New Testament and other sources mention male and female slaves among the early Christian groups. Although their "family life" is never discussed in the New Testament, we will draw an unsatisfactory picture of the family if we do not pay attention to the

¹ This article is in the review process for the conference volume for the tenth Unisa Classics Colloquium "Family as Strategy," held at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, October 2009.

² Shane Butler, "Notes on a *Membrum Disiectum*," in *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations*, ed. Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan (London: Routledge, 1998), 230.

³ Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 43.

⁴ Page DuBois, *Slaves and Other Objects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). See section one, in particular chapter 2.

Roman Empire as a slave-holding culture. However, in spite of the paucity of the sources, we may nevertheless theorize the gaps.⁵

I will use the parable from Luke 12:35-48 “to think with.”⁶ This parable encourages the disciples to be patient, by comparing God with a master of a household and using the contrast between a good and a wicked slave as an illustration. Slaves are divided into male and female, a distinction that testifies to a complex and divided social world. I am interested both in what historical scenarios and discursive strategies that might be reflected in this text, as well as how we as interpreters handle such challenging texts. I will relate to the overall discourse of slavery in the Roman Empire, although this rhetorical universe does not necessarily offer answers to all the open questions the parable generates.

I have organized my material into three main parts, starting out by reflecting on the parable and on the role of slaves in household and family, then discussing gender and sexuality in relation to ancient slavery, before finally presenting some theoretical reflections in relation to how we think, talk, and write – or remain silent – about slavery in antiquity and today.

Part 1

1. The parable

Before I discuss what kind of family this text may be talking about, I want to briefly comment on the challenge of using a parable as a text reflecting real-life social arrangements. Characteristic of the parable genre is that it uses one reality to talk about another reality, integrating both into a rhetorical unit in which the two worlds simultaneously merge and are kept apart. William Herzog challenges the conception that

⁵ I am inspired by Steven Johnstone’s reflections on how to write the histories of slaves and women from an earlier period. He suggests that we take the gaps in the ancient sources as facts to be understood and incorporated into historical accounts, in order to link ideology to lived experience. Steven Johnstone, “Cracking the Code of Silence: Athenian Legal Oratory and the Histories of Slaves and Women,” in *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations*, ed. Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan (London: Routledge, 1998), 223.

⁶ See Todd C. Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking Beyond Thecla* (T & T Clark, 2009), 6.

the parables of Jesus are either theological or moral stories, and argues that they rather are political and economic ones. According to him, parables are not stories about how God works, but how exploitation worked in ancient Palestine.⁷ I would argue that parables can be a combination of all these components, since theology and morals also deal with politics and economy. When the parable tells how slaves are beaten according to the magnitude of their perceived transgressions, some real slaves probably had such experiences in everyday life if the parable is to produce meaning. The characters and events of this parable most certainly corresponded to both slave owners' and slaves' experiences within early Christian groups. The bodies of beaten slaves function as metaphors, but for real slaves with real bodies violence did effect the integrity of their personhood. I would therefore like to suggest that the family and household parables can be used as relevant material in order for us to think about early Christian families and their rhetorical and strategic functions.

Luise Schottroff has criticized that Luke's parables that describe the life of female and male slaves have been read and interpreted as merely allegories or parables with allegorical elements (see also Luke 17:3-10 and 19:11-27). She writes: "This tradition of interpretation has justified slavery and identified the slaveowners with God."⁸ Interpreters who do not problematize the violence to which slaves were exposed, participate in a process that justifies and legitimates that some people were able to own other people. Allegorical or metaphorical slavery language depends on real slavery to make sense, as several scholars have pointed out.⁹ Accordingly, slave parables may function to uphold and re-inscribe the relations of slavery, in both the past and the present, when one-dimensional theological approaches are applied.

⁷ William R. Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 7.

⁸ Luise Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2006).

⁹ On the metaphorical use of slavery in Christian discourse, see Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 92-101. Elizabeth Castelli argues in relation to the use of slavery in Pauline letters that "the use of social relations to make a theological point is successful to the degree that the metaphor reinscribe the social relation, rather than calling it into question," in Elizabeth A. Castelli, "Romans," in *Searching the Scriptures. A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 294.

What kind of family is reflected in Luke 12:35-48? In this parable, the master of the house leaves, leaving it up to slave morality to run the house. The master is probably thought to have brought along his wife and their children and other free members of the household, and perhaps some of the other slaves. A framework of an ideal household with husband, wife, children, and slaves constitutes the social environment,¹⁰ a similar structure to what we have in the Pauline and post-Pauline household codes.¹¹ It is sometimes argued that slaves, as considered part of property, could be part of the household but not the family.¹² In this parable, however, it seems as though the good slave is part of the family, representing family values such as care and responsibility, while the wicked slave, with his cruel intentions and violent and drunken behavior, cuts himself off from family life and is “cut into pieces.”¹³

2. Slave and children - and slave children

The Gospel of Matthew (Matt 24:42-51) tells much of the same parable, but refers to “fellow slaves” [τοὺς συνδούλους], while Luke’s terminology opens up for a more flexible interpretation since the Greek term *pais* is used [τοὺς παῖδας καὶ τὰς παιδίσκας].¹⁴ Luke’s phrase in verse 45 can be translated either as boys and girls or as male slaves and female slaves, who the slave manager starts beating.¹⁵

Common terminology reflects common nature and function, but the various social relations between slaves and children in antiquity were rather complex. Slaves were like children in many ways: they were not considered grown up, but were rather thought to be immature, impulsive, irresponsible, etc. Since both slaves and children moved rather

¹⁰ Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, 38.

¹¹ Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Slavery, Sexuality and House Churches: A Reassessment of Colossians 3.18-4.1 in Light of New Research on the Roman Family," *NTS* 53 (2008).

¹² Challenged by Johnstone, "Cracking the Code of Silence: Athenian Legal Oratory and the Histories of Slaves and Women," 230.

¹³ Literally *διχοτομέω* means “cut in two,” see LSJ and Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. S.J. Daniel J Harrington, vol. 3, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 205.

¹⁴ Note the similar open interpretation of either slave or boy in Matt 8:5-13, by use of same Greek term *pais* (translated with servant in NRSV).

¹⁵ The Greek term used is *τύπτω*, translated in LSJ as “to beat, strike, smite.”

freely between households, both groups were expected to spread news and gossip.¹⁶ Regardless of age, slaves were thought of as children and treated accordingly, although there was a huge difference related to future roles: free children would themselves be part of the slave-holding class. The male slave endured the permanent status as a boy, never entering manhood. According to Roman mentality, the slave remained forever under the *potestas* (power) of the owner, although some slaves could have education and positions.¹⁷

In addition to the parents, most people who nourished and instructed upper-class children were slaves.¹⁸ Slaves were their pedagogues, care-takers, and protectors. For freeborn children, some of the most important people in their childhood must have been slaves. To strike children was most probably an integrated part of this relation. In Luke's parable it might very well be boys and girls who are mistreated by the wicked slave since they often were left in slaves' protection.

But what about slave children? Did free and slave children have anything in common? As Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald have so realistically described in their book *A Woman's Place*, free and slave children shared social space: slave and free babies could be nursed by the same woman, slaves grew up playing with their owners' children and the friends of these children, they sometimes went to school together, and slave and free children may even have had the same biological father, if the master, father, and husband of the house had made one of his female slaves pregnant.¹⁹

¹⁶ See Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 164, Bzwn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009).

¹⁷ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 24. But see James Albert Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity*, vol. 32, Hermeneutische Untersuchungen Zur Theologie (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995), 51-53.

¹⁸ Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan, eds., *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations* (London: Routledge, 1998), 13. See also Margaret Y. MacDonald, "A Place of Belonging: Perspectives on Children from Colossians and Ephesians," in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge, Coeditors: Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 303.

¹⁹ Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity, with Janet H. Tulloch* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2006), esp. ch.4. See also MacDonald, "A Place of Belonging: Perspectives on Children from Colossians and Ephesians," 299.

Why Luke uses *pais* in this context will remain an open question, but it nevertheless helps us see how slaves and children, two important groups in the ancient household, at times shared functions and roles, but also had very different opportunities. In the following I take these characters from Luke to be slaves, as Matthew does in the synoptic parallel. This parable uses a wicked slave and his mistreatment of other slaves as a bad example, but the slave-holding system as such is neither condemned nor criticized in either version.

3. Slavery and family

The institutions of both slavery and family varied greatly in terms of ideals and practices, and the variety of sources, both written and material, leaves us with a challenging work of interpretation. Throughout the Empire and over time, Roman law and social practice interacted in various ways with local rules and customs, and there were most certainly significant variations from region to region. Early Christian slavery and gender have recently been the subject of much scholarly attention,²⁰ and many books on family in early Christianity also discuss the role of slaves.²¹ In the following I will discuss the insights gained from such research, some of it obviously contested.

In the parable, the male slave manager is told by his master to take care of the other slaves. When he abuses his position, Luke writes that he strikes male and female slaves. Some translations write “men and women” (see NRSV), leading us to think that these slaves are almost like regular hetero couples, as if they were husbands and wives. But the picture is far more complex when it comes to slaves’ possibility to form their own families. According to Roman law, they did not have access to either marriage or

²⁰ Just to mention a few: Sheila Briggs, "Slavery and Gender," in *On the Cutting Edge: The Study of Women in Biblical Worlds: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, ed. Jane Schaberg, Alice Bach, and Esther Fuchs (New York: Continuum, 2004). Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Slave Wo/Men and Freedom: Some Methodological Refelctions," in *Postcolonial Interventions. Essays in Honor of R. S. Sugirtharajah*, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009). See also the various resources at Bernadette J. Brooten, "Feminist Sexual Ethics Project," (<http://www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/>).

²¹ See e.g. Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches*, The Family, Religion, and Culture (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

parenthood.²² Their owners could split families, move some of them, or sell however many of them.²³ Male slaves did not have access to legal fatherhood, although they were biological fathers.²⁴ Slaves born by slave mothers had no legal father,²⁵ regardless of whether the biological father, when known, was slave or free. Slave babies increased the property of their mother's owners.²⁶ We may say that instead of forming their own families, slaves helped to run their owners' families.

However, although slaves legally had access to neither marriage nor parenthood, some epigraphic sources point at how slaves at times formed couples and could live in long-term relationships.²⁷ If we conclude that slaves were not involved in family life because the public discourse said so, we confuse ideology and lived experience.²⁸ We must assume that there were huge variations, and that our sources are incapable of giving any complete picture of the situation.

Another important issue that in particular has been discussed by Jennifer Glancy is slaves' roles as surrogate bodies.²⁹ Slaves were considered as both things and persons. They could be imprisoned on behalf of their owners, beaten instead of their owners, and both male and female slaves were sexually available for their owners and others.³⁰ The most important sign of free male status was bodily integrity, i.e. that they were not

²² According to Harrill, "Slaves could not start their own families. To be sure, slaves had what they (and their masters) considered spouses and families, but such unions had no recognition in the law, and so were subject to separation by sale to different owners." Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity*, 55. See also Carolyn Osiek, "Female Slaves, *Porneia*, and the Limits of Obedience," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue. Religion, Marriage, and Family*, ed. Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 258.

²³ See Joshel and Murnaghan, eds., *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture*, 3.

²⁴ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 26.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶ Glancy writes: "Some slave children grew up in the same household with their mothers, but many others were not so lucky." (5) And further: "[S]laveholders were certainly aware of the potential of female slaves to increase household wealth by bearing future generations of slaves." (18) *Ibid.* and also 26, 73-74.

²⁷ See Dale B. Martin, "Slave Families and Slaves in Families," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Religion, Marriage, and Family* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

²⁸ See Johnstone, "Cracking the Code of Silence: Athenian Legal Oratory and the Histories of Slaves and Women," 223.

²⁹ She writes: "Slaveholders in the first century characterized their slaves as bodies, and their treatment of their slaves was commensurate with that characterization," Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10-16. See also Joshel and Murnaghan, eds., *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture*, 7.

subject to sexual penetration or corporal punishment, a privilege also held by the poorest among the free men, in contrast to slaves.³¹ Related to the parable it is intriguing to notice that the slave who strikes the other slaves is blamed for doing so, whereas when the master at the end cuts this slave into pieces it seems to be “according to procedure.” Physical violence was a means of discipline within the ruling male discourse and a sign of uncontrolled behavior when performed by a slave. As Saller has noted, “the application of the whip generally marked slave from free.”³² We may ask what the wicked slave is actually blamed for: for taking on the master’s role of beating, or because he transgress his subordinate role?

Some slaves were born by slave mothers, while others became slaves later in life. The writing elite seem to be haunted by the constant fear and threat of becoming enslaved: they could be taken as prisoners of war, kidnapped, or enslaved due to high debt.³³ If prisoners of war were sold to a slave owner far away, they would have to mix with a group of slaves who had a different language, culture, skin color, and custom. They became part of the same serving class of a household, some with a past as free persons while others born into slavery. Were they all treated as owned and available bodies? What if some new slaves were already married and had children? How did the variety in background influence the slave hierarchy?

For ancient thinkers it seems to be important to keep a clear-cut distinction between slave and free. Free status was a fixed category, not negotiated or contested. The discourse of family paid attention to freeborn persons, while other rules regulated the serving class. Still, as we have seen, a person could move between the two statuses: free persons could

³¹ Joshel and Murnaghan, eds., *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture*, 18.

³² Quoting Saller, in *Ibid.*, 6.

³³ Note also that some freeborn babies who were not acknowledged by their fathers could be exposed, and if they were found by slaves they grew up among slaves, Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 74-77. See also the discussion on voluntary enslavement, Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 80-85, Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*. 80-85, John Byron, *Recent Research on Paul and Slavery* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2008), 77-80.

be enslaved and slaves could be manumitted³⁴ or flee and become “runaway slaves.”³⁵ Apparently, the hierarchies were not stable and secure.

Part 2

Slavery and gender

When we add gender to the discussion of family and slavery, we are confronted with some complex challenges of interpretation. It seems crucial to reflect again upon what we mean by family. Although slaves could not form legal families, according to political and religious codes in antiquity, we can nevertheless ask analytical questions about slave families. Denied official family status, we can still assume slaves had some “family life.” What kind of dilemmas occurred for a slave, whose body belonged to one master, to be part of a couple with another slave, in a hetero or a same-sex relationship? How could slaves, whose production and reproduction were owned by someone else, make their own families? How did gender influence a slave’s role in the family and the household?

The Lukan parable I use to think with is rare in mentioning female slaves, together with a few other NT texts.³⁶ Luke, in contrast to Matthew, felt for some reason the need to gender the slaves he mentions. By use of a heterogender dichotomy he gives a glimpse into a gender-divided slave culture. Luke Timothy Johnson explains this by stating that “[i]t is typical of Luke to notice both genders,” a solution that does not take into account that gender has a different meaning for slave and free.³⁷ In the overall discourse of slavery in antiquity, several scholars have pointed out that “[s]laves of both genders were

³⁴ See in particular Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity*.

³⁵ See discussion in J. Albert Harrill, “The Dramatic Function of the Running Slave Rhoda (Acts 12:13-16): A Piece of Greco-Roman Comedy,” *NTS* 46 (2000). In addition, some few ancient authors argue that it is spiritual slavery that is really dangerous. What happens to the body has no consequence since it is the freedom of moral choice that counts. But note Glancy, who argues “For both Epictetus and Paul, the rhetoric of physical slavery haunts the claim that the only real bondage is the servility of will, of mind, or of spirit.” Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 30.

³⁶ See the stories in Acts of Rhoda, the slave girl who encounters Peter and is accused by the others of being mad (Acts 12:13-15), and the possessed slave girl whom Paul heals from her possession/talent in fortune-telling (Acts 16:16-18). For an overview of New Testament texts dealing with slavery, see Osiek and Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches*, chapt. 7, “Slaves.”

³⁷ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 204.

supposed to be only the passive objects of their master's will and desire."³⁸ The distinction between male and female was important only for free persons, for slaves it was irrelevant.³⁹ To some extent, slaves were without gender and their sex did not matter.⁴⁰ Accordingly, female slaves were seen as slaves, not women.⁴¹

Male and female slaves were owned by others, indicating that also their bodies and sexuality were owned. Nevertheless, the gender difference between slaves actually played a role in relation to sexuality and reproduction. For female slaves the hope of manumission was closely connected to sexual relations.⁴² By marrying her owner or another free man or surviving many childbirths, a female slave could be freed.⁴³ Male slaves did not have similar hopes.⁴⁴ If they formed couples with other female slaves they could never be sure of their fatherhood, since the pregnant mother probably would have several possible fathers, at times including the male owner. In fact, male slaves lacked not only access to legal fatherhood, but also access to biological fatherhood was most uncertain. I wonder whether male slaves were in fact most excluded from family life, since female slaves could at least could in the bodily process of child production and nursing.

In the parable, both male and female slaves are beaten, not by their owners but by another, wicked slave who represents the owner. Since Luke mentions it, what role did gender play when slaves were beaten? Were they beaten differently? When a male person beats female slaves, was it in any ways sexualized?⁴⁵ Could beating lead to sexual

³⁸ Butler writes: "Slaves of both genders were supposed to be only the passive objects of their master's will and desire, though in practice (and even in theory) things seldom were really that simple." Butler, "Notes on a *Membrum Disiectum*," 248.

³⁹ Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, 42.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴¹ See also Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 96.

⁴² MacDonald, "Slavery, Sexuality and House Churches," 96.

⁴³ Osiek, "Female Slaves, *Porneia*, and the Limits of Obedience," 259-61.

⁴⁴ Osiek discusses in what way it was shameful for a female slave owner to have a sexual relation with her male slave, and such marriages were discouraged, see *Ibid.*, e.g. 261 and 266.

⁴⁵ Note that Johnson translates *tuptein* with abuse, see Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 204.

violence too, as if when the body's integrity was attacked through striking, the way was short to other forms of penetration, such as sexual penetration?⁴⁶

New Testament interpreters have recently discussed in what way the Christian community followed the conventional moral values in which masters could sexually use their slaves, or whether “sexual violation of slaves and the break-up of slave families ... was something to be avoided by masters in the *ekklesia* who sought to treat their slaves ‘justly and fairly.’”⁴⁷ Margaret MacDonald argues, by use of newer research into the Roman family, that sexual treatment of slaves “must have varied widely” given “the complexity of familial arrangement in general.”⁴⁸ Nevertheless, in Luke's parable male and female slaves are objects of violence legitimated by gender and class, with sexual overtones. The parable describes a household hierarchy that legitimates physical violence. Whatever theological meaning this parable may have, it uses corrupted relationships, violence, and sexual differences in the everyday lives of real slaves as rhetorical devices.

Part 3

Final theoretical reflections

The overall theme, “Family as strategy in the Roman Empire/Early Christianity,” can be studied from many different angles. What we find in history is always also part of our strategy or context as interpreters. We decide what questions to ask, we choose what perspective to read from, we decide what to look for and where to look. How we search in history will also reveal much about ourselves, and challenge our ethics of

⁴⁶ See how female slaves are described as extremely powerless and vulnerable, also sexually, functioning as a vehicle for addressing others' concerns, in Joshel and Murnaghan, eds., *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture*, 7.

⁴⁷ MacDonald, "Slavery, Sexuality and House Churches," 112. See also MacDonald's discussion with Glancy where she writes “Paul's failure to clarify whether sexual contact with one's own slaves constitutes *porneia* raises the question of whether Paul's silence was due to an unspoken expectation that the sexual use of slaves is abhorrent or, conversely, to an expectation of cultural norms regarding the sexual use of slaves.” Quotation from MacDonald, 112.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 94.

interpretation.⁴⁹ Scholarship is not an isolated world in which some neutral persons can present what happened in the past without also contributing to how it is re-imagined.⁵⁰

I am interested in slaves because I think we will understand neither family nor early Christianity without paying attention to them. Slavery structures must be made visible, in history as well as in our time.⁵¹ I am particularly interested in female slaves since they suffer a double oppression. Starting out as a feminist, from a privileged white Norwegian middle-class context, I have only recently realized that gender never exists in isolation: elite women have positions in which gender intersects with other categories. Elizabeth Spelman points out that how a woman is treated never has to do with her gender only, but also depends on her class and race.⁵² But we cannot simply add information about slaves and information about women in order to find information about female slaves in antiquity.⁵³ We need a more complex, analytical approach.

There are some (though few) female slaves mentioned in the New Testament, but feminist commentaries have not been much concerned with them.⁵⁴ The female slaves mentioned in Luke 12:45 are not central characters when women's history is written. Due to political or theological challenges, feminist exegesis has been most interested in women with leadership roles. Some of these women were probably slave owners themselves or belonged to slave-holding families.⁵⁵ Also among feminist classical

⁴⁹ See the various discussions in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

⁵⁰ See the recent discussion in Penner and Vander Stichele, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking Beyond Thecla*, esp. chapt. 4.

⁵¹ A recent Norwegian documentary (in English) argues that around 37 billion people live in structures of slavery today, and issues related to family are indeed strongly involved, see Thomas Robsahm, "Modern Slavery," (Norway: <http://www.nfi.no/english/norwegianfilms/show.html?id=706>, 2009).

⁵² Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, 53. I use Spelman's words (p. 38), only replacing Aristotle with Luke: "An account of 'Luke's views about women' that doesn't inquire seriously into what he says about slave women not only announces that the position of slave women is theoretically insignificant, it also gives a radically incomplete picture of what he says about women who are not slaves."

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁴ See Osiek's telling comment: "Female slaves as a group have been very little studied." Osiek, "Female Slaves, *Porneia*, and the Limits of Obedience," 260. One very good recent contribution which pays attention to female slaves as one group of "women" is Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*. Note in particular the chapter called "Female Slaves: Double Vulnerable."

⁵⁵ See Osiek, "Female Slaves, *Porneia*, and the Limits of Obedience," 258.

scholars, the interest in elite women has been most prominent.⁵⁶ Of course, the sources are few and often brief, but if researchers concerned with women or family in the past are primarily interested in privileged women, we ignore that women are also part of hierarchies in which other women are oppressed. If our interest in gender leads our attention towards women who are only oppressed “as women,” we may overlook that such women are subject to “pure sexism” because they are on top of other hierarchical systems.

The crucial point here, as I see it, is to map how various categories work together and mutually construct each other. The parable in Luke 12 is here particularly interesting to think with, since it operates with a complex web of social relations. Within recent gender research the concept of *intersectionality* has gained increasing currency.⁵⁷ It has become the primary analytic tool that feminist and anti-racist scholars deploy for theorizing identity and oppression.⁵⁸ When white Western feminists in the 1960s and 70s started to criticize male-centrism, their insights about oppression “as a woman” tended to conflate the experiences of one particular group of women with those of all women.⁵⁹ In the early 1980s African-American scholar-activists in particular started to question the hegemony of white women within the feminist movement. They argued that the experiences of African-American women are not shaped only by race but also by gender, social class, and sexuality.⁶⁰ Awareness of how different social divisions cannot be understood in isolation, but are mutually modifying and reinforcing each other, is central to

⁵⁶ Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, 52-53.

⁵⁷ See Gudrun-Axeli Knapp, "Race, Class, Gender: Reclaiming Baggage in Fast Travelling Theories," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 12, no. 3 (2005).

⁵⁸ Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 1. See also Kathy Davis, "Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful," *Feminist Theory* 9 (2008): 68. Leslie McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, no. 3 (2005): 1777. Note, however, that “Intersectionality” is not mentioned as a keyword in 2001 in Sarah Gamble, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, Routledge Companions (London, New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁵⁹ Especially black women in the USA started to question academic feminists’ focus on the oppression of women, arguing that gender could not be studied in isolation. The critique of white feminism’s hegemony and exclusive practice was strongly articulated in Kimberlé Crenshaw, ed. *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*, vol. 139 (University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989).

⁶⁰ For a critical presentation of how intersectionality relates to feminist theory, see Paulina De los Reyes and Diana Mulinari, *Intersektionalitet: Kritiska Reflektioner Över (O)Jämlikhetens Landskap* (Stockholm: Liber, 2005), esp. 78-88.

intersectional studies.⁶¹ Instead of examining gender, race, class, age, and sexuality as separate categories of oppression, intersectionality explores how these categories overlap.⁶² Every person belongs to more than one category, and faced with discrimination it might be difficult to articulate which correlative system of oppression is at work. Various oppressive mechanisms can work together and create new hierarchies and systems of discrimination.⁶³ Intersectionality offers a language to talk about cultural complexity and our role in the production of knowledge.⁶⁴

I started by referring to Page DuBois, who did not find slaves in museum exhibitions from antiquity. If we use the language of Aleida Assmann's memory theory, extant stories of slaves and slavery are stored into the archive while the slave-holders' stories have become part of canon, our active cultural memory.⁶⁵ Slaves had their place, i.e. *no* place, in ancient domestic space, but they were actually all over the place, since the whole social machinery depended on them. Similarly, when New Testament or classical interpreters focus on elite women only, we may say that the feminist memory has stored the story of slavery into the archive.⁶⁶ DuBois wants to write slaves into history and

⁶¹ See e.g. Ann Phoenix and Pamela Pattynama, eds., *European Journal of Women's Studies (Issue on Intersectionality)*, vol. 13 (2006). See in particular their Introduction. See also Loreen Iminza Maseno, "Widows' Christologies: A Preliminary Feminist Analysis of Abanyole Widows' Christologies Considering Kinship, Gender and the Power of Naming" (Doctoral Dissertation, Faculty of Theology University of Oslo, 2008), 30.

⁶² Patricia Hill Collins, "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation," *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 63.

⁶³ See also how similar concerns have led Schüssler Fiorenza to talk about kyriarchal/kyriocentric, from the Greek term for lord, in order to "underscore that domination is not simply a matter of patriarchal, gender-based dualism but of more comprehensive, interlocking, hierarchically ordered structures of domination, evident in a variety of oppressions, such as racism, poverty, heterosexism, and colonialism," see e.g. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic.*, ix. In a recent article she mentions "gender and its intersections with race, class and imperialism." Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Transforming the Margin - Claiming Common Ground: Charting a Different Paradigm of Biblical Studies," in *Still at the Margins: Biblical Scholarship Fifteen Years after Voices from the Margin*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Transforming the Margin* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 24. Theories of intersectionality may offer a vocabulary and an overall structure that are helpful when a kyriarchal model is employed. In addition, by use of intersectionality New Testament scholars strengthen the involvement with the recent interdisciplinary theoretical dialogue, building on insights from other fields concerned with oppression and discrimination.

⁶⁴ See also the research project chaired by Halvor Moxnes, of which I am a participant: "Jesus in Cultural Complexity," ((Univeristy of Oslo) www.tf.uio.no/jc).

⁶⁵ Aleida Assmann, "The Religious Roots of Cultural Memory," *NTT* 4, no. 109 (2008).

⁶⁶ See Schüssler Fiorenza's usage of "feminist memory" in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Discipleship of Equals: Memory and Vision," *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 16 (2008): 77.

memory, not just add them, but let them disturb and disrupt our narratives from the past.⁶⁷ This is crucial since our memory not only reflects the past, but also shapes the present reality by providing us with understandings and symbolic frameworks that help us make sense of the world.⁶⁸

In museums, curators and researchers on behalf of our societies choose what to present as our memory, what to include in the cultural canon, and what to store into the archive. By use of the theoretical framework of cultural memory, we may say that the bible is both canon and archive. Some stories are considered more central, some particular characters are remembered. Memory is selective; what is not remembered is almost forgotten, because it is never in use, it is never made visible. When it comes to female slaves, we may ask if they are to be found in the archive at all; we must work hard to find them.

When we talk about family as strategy, crucial questions will be: Who did not belong to the family? Who is not remembered as family? How did gender and class determine who was excluded from the family discourse? If we focus on the memory of elite families only, we may risk increasing the gap between the “haves” and “have nots,” in the past as well as the present, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points out. In the age of globalization this represents an urgent challenge that biblical scholars and other interpreters of antiquity must take seriously.⁶⁹

We must theorize the gaps in the ancient sources, and challenge the structures that uphold the hierarchies. Which biblical texts and characters that are stored into the archive or considered part of the canon when family is scrutinized, will affect how the bible can be used in current discussions of family values. The conservative nuclear family ideology faces some major challenges when confronted with early Christian slave bodies. In addition, class, race, age, and gender intersect also today to construct certain power

⁶⁷ DuBois, *Slaves and Other Objects*, 81.

⁶⁸ Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, Theorizing Society (Maidenhead, Berkshire, England Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2003), 13. See also Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, Themes in the Social Sciences (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁶⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Transforming the Margin - Claiming Common Ground: Charting a Different Paradigm of Biblical Studies," 37.

relations, within or outside of families, which look much like slavery.⁷⁰ By use of intersectionality and memory theory, I suggest that we pay attention to “the margins” and move some forgotten stories and characters from the archive into the canon. As I have tried to argue, slavery and family may be a place to start.

Bibliography

- Assmann, Aleida. "The Religious Roots of Cultural Memory." *NTT* 4, no. 109 (2008): 271-92.
- Briggs, Sheila. "Slavery and Gender." In *On the Cutting Edge: The Study of Women in Biblical Worlds: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, edited by Jane Schaberg, Alice Bach and Esther Fuchs, 171-92. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Brooten, Bernadette J. "Feminist Sexual Ethics Project."
<http://www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/>.
- Butler, Shane. "Notes on a *Membrum Disiectum*." In *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations*, edited by Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan, 236-55. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Byron, John. *Recent Research on Paul and Slavery*. Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2008.
- Castelli, Elizabeth A. "Romans." In *Searching the Scriptures. A Feminist Commentary*, edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 272-300. New York: Crossroad, 1994.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation." *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 62-82.
- Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*, Themes in the Social Sciences. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé, ed. *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*. Vol. 139: University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989.
- Davis, Kathy. "Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful." *Feminist Theory* 9, (2008): 67-83.
- De los Reyes, Paulina, and Diana Mulinari. *Intersektionalitet: Kritiska Reflektioner Över (O)Jämlikhetens Landskap*. Stockholm: Liber, 2005.
- DuBois, Page. *Slaves and Other Objects*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Gamble, Sarah, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, Routledge Companions. London, New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Glancy, Jennifer A. *Slavery in Early Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Harrill, J. Albert. "The Dramatic Function of the Running Slave Rhoda (Acts 12:13-16): A Piece of Greco-Roman Comedy." *NTS* 46, (2000): 150-57.
- Harrill, James Albert. *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity*. Vol. 32, Hermeneutische Untersuchungen Zur Theologie. Tübingen: Mohr, 1995.

⁷⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza mentions present day relations and how “millions of people ... have been forced by traffickers into prostitution or dept bondage,” in Schüssler Fiorenza, "Slave Wo/Men and Freedom: Some Methodological Refelctions," 123.

- Herzog, William R. *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.
- "Jesus in Cultural Complexity." (University of Oslo) www.tf.uio.no/jc.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Gospel of Luke*. Edited by S.J. Daniel J Harrington. Vol. 3, Sacra Pagina Series. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991.
- Johnstone, Steven. "Cracking the Code of Silence: Athenian Legal Oratory and the Histories of Slaves and Women." In *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations*, edited by Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan, 221-34. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Joshel, Sandra R., and Sheila Murnaghan, eds. *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Kartzow, Marianne Bjelland. *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles*. Vol. 164, Bzwn. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.
- Knapp, Gudrun-Axeli. "Race, Class, Gender: Reclaiming Baggage in Fast Travelling Theories." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 12, no. 3 (2005): 249-65.
- MacDonald, Margaret Y. "A Place of Belonging: Perspectives on Children from Colossians and Ephesians." In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge, Coeditors: Terence E. Fretheim and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 278-304. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- . "Slavery, Sexuality and House Churches: A Reassessment of Colossians 3.18-4.1 in Light of New Research on the Roman Family." *NTS* 53, (2008): 94-113.
- Martin, Dale B. "Slave Families and Slaves in Families." In *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, edited by Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, 207-30. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003.
- . *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Maseno, Loreen Iminza. "Widows' Christologies: A Preliminary Feminist Analysis of Abanyole Widows' Christologies Considering Kinship, Gender and the Power of Naming." Doctoral Dissertation, Faculty of Theology University of Oslo, 2008.
- McCall, Leslie. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, no. 3 (2005): 1771-800.
- Misztal, Barbara A. *Theories of Social Remembering, Theorizing Society*. Maidenhead, Berkshire, England Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2003.
- Nash, Jennifer C. "Re-Thinking Intersectionality." *Feminist Review* 89, (2008): 1-15.
- Osiek, Carolyn. "Female Slaves, *Porneia*, and the Limits of Obedience." In *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue. Religion, Marriage, and Family*, edited by Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, 255-74. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Osiek, Carolyn, and David L. Balch. *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches, The Family, Religion, and Culture*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.
- Osiek, Carolyn, and Margaret Y. MacDonald. *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity, with Janet H. Tulloch*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Penner, Todd C., and Caroline Vander Stichele. *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking Beyond Thecla*: T & T Clark, 2009.

- Phoenix, Ann, and Pamela Pattynama, eds. *European Journal of Women's Studies (Issue on Intersectionality)*. Vol. 13, 2006.
- Robsahm, Thomas. "Modern Slavery." Norway: <http://www.nfi.no/english/norwegianfilms/show.html?id=706>, 2009.
- Schottroff, Luise. *The Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. "Discipleship of Equals: Memory and Vision." *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 16, (2008): 67-90.
- . *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
- . "Slave Wo/Men and Freedom: Some Methodological Refelctions." In *Postcolonial Interventions. Essays in Honor of R. S. Sugirtharajah*, edited by Tatt-siong Benny Liew. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009.
- . "Transforming the Margin - Claiming Common Ground: Charting a Different Paradigm of Biblical Studies." In *Still at the Margins: Biblical Scholarship Fifteen Years after Voices from the Margin*, edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah, 22-39. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
- Spelman, Elizabeth V. *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.