

A MODEL MINORITY?
REPRESENTATIONS OF Jael IN JUDGES 4 AND 5

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1. INTRODUCTION¹

Judges 4 and 5 juxtapose two accounts of Jael's murder of Sisera, one in prose and the other in poetry. Recent studies of these texts have surfaced important ideological concerns about the role and function of a non-Israelite heroine in a book that predominantly focuses on Israelite heroes.² Such interests are most notably on display in Katherine Doob Sakenfeld's 2007 presidential address at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.³ In her speech, Sakenfeld challenged her fellow scholars to open biblical texts to a diverse array of contextual perspectives, and as test case, offered her own postcolonial reading of the story of Jael in Judges 4-5.⁴ In Sakenfeld's view, Jael, as neither Israelite nor Canaanite, is a type of borderland figure in the overarching drama of Israelite-Canaanite conflict, and as such, offers a potential

¹ I would like to thank Jacqueline Lapsley and Carol Newsom for their insightful feedback on earlier drafts on this paper. Their input and suggestions have proven invaluable to his project. Any errors or omissions remain my own.

² One of the earliest and most significant contributions to the study of literary representations of Jael in Judges 4-5 is Mieke Bal's 1987 book *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987). Since then, a host of other scholars have likewise focused on questions prompted by literary and ideological approaches to Judges 4-5. For instance, see Deryn Guest, *When Deborah Met Jael: Lesbian Biblical Hermeneutics* (London: SCM Press, 2005); Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, "Controlling Perspectives: Women, Men, and the Authority of Violence in Judges 4-5," *JAAR* 58 (1990): 389-411; Gale A. Yee, "By the Hand of a Woman: The Metaphor of the Woman Warrior in Judges 4," *Semeia* 61 (1993): 99-132; idem, "Yin / Yang is not Me," in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Juan; St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 2006), 152-63; Susan Ackerman, "What if Judges Had Been Written by a Philistine?" *BibInt* 8 (2000): 33-41; Elie Assis, "'The Hand of a Woman': Deborah and Jael (Judges 4)," *JHS* 5 (2005): 1-12. Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Uncovering Jael and Sisera: A New Reading," *SJOT* 19 (2005): 24-47; Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Deborah, Jael, and Sisera's Mother: Reading the Scriptures in Cross-Cultural Context," in *Women, Gender, and Christian Community* (ed. Jane Dempsey Douglass and James F. Kay; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 13-22; and most recently, Carolyn Sharp, *Wrestling the Word: The Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Believer* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2011).

³ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Whose Text is It?" *JBL* 127 (2008): 5-18.

⁴ Sakenfeld, "Whose Text," 12. Similar postcolonial reflections have been offered on other biblical figures, such as Rahab and Ruth. On Rahab, see Musa W. Dube, "Rahab Says Hello to Judith: A Decolonizing Feminist Reading," in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 142-158. On Ruth, see, Dube, "Divining Ruth for International Relations," in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (ed. Musa W. Dube; Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship 2; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 179-95; and Laura E. Donaldson, "The Sign of Orpah: Reading Ruth through Native Eyes," in *Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 130-44. Though not addressing Jael specifically, Uriah Y. Kim's essay, "Who is the Other in the Book of Judges?" (*Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* [ed. Gale A. Yee; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2007], 161-82) offers a helpful entry point for a postcolonial reading of Judges 4-5.

point of contact for contemporary postcolonial subjects who likewise are caught between competing socio-cultural and political forces.⁵

The purpose of this paper is to continue the conversation Sakenfeld began about the story of Jael by exploring how Judges 4-5 might be read from the context of contemporary third-world readers who, as immigrants or refugees, must negotiate questions about loyalty and assimilation within a first-world setting. As an American-born white male, I do not claim first-hand knowledge of such contexts, and my own place as a reader at best can be described as being pro-postcolonial in terms of my theological convictions and political commitments. However, I do come to the text bearing countless stories about how my own maternal and paternal grandparents struggled to gain an economic and cultural foothold in this country as Italian immigrants from the early 1900s. Even as my grandparents' experiences might only partially overlap with those of contemporary immigrants from third-world nations, past and present immigrants alike face a similar dilemma: their success and acceptance in their new setting is largely contingent on assimilating into and aligning with the dominant cultural paradigm. As a result, I find myself approaching Judges 4-5 not only with questions about what it means for Jael to be a heroine in this story, but also how such heroism might be contingent on choosing sides in the Israelite-Canaanite conflict.

I will proceed in two ways. First, in contrast to Sakenfeld who draws a composite picture of Jael from a reading of Judges 4-5 as a whole, I will examine how these two accounts of Jael's murder of Sisera construct different profiles of Jael's actions and, as a result, prompt different assessments of how she functions as a heroine. Second, by drawing on postcolonial theories

⁵ Sakenfeld, "Whose Text," 17-18.

about mimeticism and model minorities, I will demonstrate how the subtle differences between the Jael of Judges 4 and the Jael of Judges 5 might become quite significant when viewed from the perspective of contemporary immigrant populations who not only face the pressure of assimilation, but also the specter of deportation.

2. THE Jael OF JUDGES 4 – A HEROINE FOR ISRAEL

Judges 4 situates Jael's encounter with Sisera within the formulaic pattern of rebellion, punishment, repentance, and deliverance that recurs throughout the book as a whole: in 4:1 the Israelites rebel by doing "evil in the eyes of the LORD;" in 4:2 they are punished by being sold into the hands of the Canaanites; and when they "cry out to the LORD" in 4:3, God raises up a deliverer, or a judge, to free them. If the beginning of this chapter seems to adhere to a characteristic narrative pattern, then it is all the more striking how Judges 4 subverts the expectation that the anticipated deliverer will be a man. In v. 4 the one who is judging Israel at that time is Deborah, "a woman, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth." The piling on of these three feminine terms, according to Robert Alter, produces a type of "purposeful awkwardness" that drives home the surprising fact that a woman, not a man, will deliver Israel.⁶ Furthermore, in v. 9 Deborah explicitly tells Barak that the LORD will give the Canaanite military leader, Sisera, "into the hand of a woman." At this point in the narrative, the reader might well suspect

⁶ Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 41. Interestingly, the only other woman specifically identified as an Israelite prophet, Huldah, is introduced with a similar formula: "the prophetess Huldah the wife of Shallum" (2 Kgs 22:14).

that this woman is Deborah herself.⁷ Thus, if Deborah's prediction unsettles expectations about the deliverer's gender, it does little to disturb the notion that the hero will be an Israelite.

Yet, here the narrative takes a surprising turn. Deborah quickly fades to the background just as another woman, Jael, appears. She is the focus of the rest of the prose account: When Sisera flees on foot to her tent after being defeated in battle (v. 17), Jael hospitably invites him in before slaying him in his sleep (vv. 18-21). By the time Jael shows Barak the dead body of Sisera (v. 22), it is clear that God has delivered Sisera, and thus the Canaanites, into Jael's hands.

Even as Jael plays the formulaic role of Israelite deliverer in this narrative, there is nothing formulaic about her identity. In a drama about Israelites and Canaanites, Jael is neither. Rather, Jael is said to be the wife of Heber the Kenite in Judges 4:17.⁸ While the text does not make clear whether Jael herself is a Kenite, her Kenite connection, however it might be construed, plays an important role in Judges 4. Specifically, verses 11-17 imply that the Kenites had ties of loyalty both to the Israelites and the Canaanites. By referring to the Kenites as the descendants of Hobab, Moses's father-in-law, v. 11 activates a tradition in which the Kenites and Israelites are linked through ancient kinship. On the other hand, v. 17 explains that Sisera flees to the tent of Jael because there was some sort of political allegiance, or peace,

⁷ A host of modern interpreters assume that Deborah is the true hero of Judges 4-5. For instance, Assis contends that while Jael fulfills Deborah's prediction, it is still Deborah who is Israel's deliverer, and thus the focus of the story ("The Hand of a Woman," 11). Likewise, McCann believes that Deborah is referring to herself in verse 4:9 (*Judges*, 51-53). Perhaps most poignantly, Charles Gore, Henry Leighton Goudge, and Alfred Guillaume claim that "the heroine of the story is Deborah, a prophetess with the power of a Joan of Arc, who rouses Barak to lead the Northern tribes against Sisera" (*A New Commentary on Holy Scripture* [London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1928], 156).

⁸ The introduction of Jael as אִשְׁתּוֹ חֶבְרֵן הַכְּנִיזִי is often translated "the wife of Heber the Kenite." Yet as Susan Ackerman notes, this phrase can also be rendered as "a woman of the Kenite community" based on the use of *rbex* in Hos 6:9 to mean "band" or "company" and comparative evidence from Mari in which *hibrum* describes a community, clan, or tribe (Ackerman, "Written by a Philistine," 38; cf. A. Malamat, "Mari and the Bible: Some Patterns of Tribal Organization and Institutions," *JAOS* 82 [1962]: 144-46).

between Heber the Kenite and the Canaanite king Jabin. By prefacing Jael's encounter with Sisera with this information about Kenite loyalties, Judges 4 prepares the reader to understand Jael's subsequent actions as being either pro-Israelite or pro-Canaanite: if she offers safe haven to Sisera, she becomes an accomplice of the Canaanites; if she turns against Sisera and helps secure Barak's military victory, she solidifies an alliance with the Israelites.⁹

The subsequent narrative leaves no doubt about whose side Jael chooses. Her actions hint of a premeditated plot to assassinate the Canaanite commander. By calling Sisera to "turn aside" (סור), a verb used elsewhere in the HB to express a hospitable invitation, Jael leverages a social convention to lure Sisera into her tent. Likewise, by urging Sisera to "have no fear," Jael draws upon language often used to express reassurance in military contexts to lull Sisera into a false sense of security. Jael then gives Sisera milk and covers him with a rug to help him sleep, not unlike a mother caring for a baby. This ruse has infantilizing – if not emasculating – implications.¹⁰ The reader can hardly miss the ensuing irony: when Sisera instructs Jael to tell any visitor that there is no man in the tent, Jael need not lie.¹¹ In either case, once Sisera is put to bed and is "lying fast asleep" (v. 21), Jael is able to carrying out the murder.

⁹ On this point, I disagree with Yairah Amit who contends that the neutrality of the Kenites makes it hard to explain Jael's actions ("Judges 4: Its Contents and Form," *JOT* 39 [1987]: 97). To say that the Kenites are neutral is to suggest that they have remained outside the fray of the Israelite-Canaanite conflict. Yet Judges 4 seems to clearly indicate that rather than being neutral, the Kenites had conflicting political allegiances.

¹⁰ Reis, and to a lesser extent Assis and Fewell and Gunn, understand the imagery of Judges 4 as sexually explicit. However, I contend that such an assessment is better reserved for the language of Judges 5. In my estimation, this reading conflates the motherly imagery of Judges 4 with the more sexually connotative language of Judges 5. Especially in the case of Reis, her "erotic reading" of Judges 4 arises from a methodological commitment to reading Judges 4 and 5 as "an integrated, unified exposition" ("Uncovering Jael and Sisera," 44).

¹¹ The NRSV's rather tepid translation, "Is there anyone here?" obscures the irony of Sisera's deflated position.

Whatever objection the reader might have concerning Jael's violation of conventions of hospitality is quickly ameliorated by the concluding two verses of the prose account.¹² By informing the reader that God subdued the Canaanites on the very same day Jael killed Sisera, it becomes clear that if Jael is a morally suspect assassin, then Yahweh is culpable for ordering the "hit." As the instrument of God's deliverance, this non-Israelite heroine seems to enact the common proverb "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." This form of political allegiance is not unfamiliar in biblical literature, as is especially evident in Yahweh's promise to Israel to be "an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes" in Exod 23:22. This does not imply that Jael's actions lacked self-interest at a more personal level. To be sure, when news of the Israelites' rout of the Canaanites reaches her tent, it might well have become a matter of personal safety for Jael to side with the winners. Nevertheless, Judges 4 more directly underscores that Jael's actions reflect a certain cooperative allegiance with Israel.

3. THE Jael OF JUDGES 5 – A HEROINE AMONG WOMEN

There are numerous differences that exist between the poetic account of Judges 5 and the prose narrative of Judges 4. Specifically, I wish to draw attention to how Judges 5 evokes for the reader a different sense of Jael's heroism.

First, although Judges 5, like Judges 4, introduces Jael as "the wife of Heber the Kenite" (5:24), the poem says nothing more of the Kenites or their connections to the Israelites and Canaanites. Even if the audience already knows the backstory of the Kenites and their

¹² Nevertheless, some modern commentators refuse to see in Jael anything but an example of immoral behavior. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch contend that Jael's "heroic deed cannot be acquitted of the sins of lying, treachery, and assassination" (Keil and Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* [trans. James Martin; BCOT 4; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1956], 306). Interestingly, almost identical behavior by an Israelite, as in the case of Ehud's assassination of Eglon, is treated much more favorably.

genealogical and political ties, that the poem omits these details is significant. For one, it is less clear in Judges 5 why Sisera might have approached Jael's tent: Is Sisera intentionally seeking refuge in the tent of a political ally, or does he simply have no better option at the moment? In addition, while Jael's actions still ultimately advance the cause of the Israelites, it is far more ambiguous in Judges 5 whether her actions reflect a choice between the Israelite and Canaanites loyalties held by her husband's clan.

Second, Judges 5 provides fewer details about Jael's encounter with Sisera. For instance, Jael neither invites Sisera into the safety of her tent nor lulls him into a vulnerable sleep. Rather, Sisera simply appears in v. 25 and then is murdered in vv. 26-27. As a result, whereas Jael's actions seem planned and purposeful in Judges 4, there is no clear sense of premeditation in Judges 5. In addition, Jael never announces her deed to Barak (cf. 4:22) and no narrative comment is provided that links Sisera's death to God's subduing of the Canaanites (cf. 4:23-24). Because of this, it is far less clear in the poetic account that Jael is cast in the role of Israel's deliverer.

Perhaps most significantly, Judges 5 seems to provide a slightly different account of the circumstances surrounding Jael's murder of Sisera. For instance, Judges 4:21 implies that Jael kills Sisera while he is lying fast asleep. This would explain why Jael must approach him "softly" (בְּלֵטָה) and why the tent peg is said to be driven into the ground after being hammered into his temple. A different description obtains in Judges 5. In the poetic account, it is only after the fatal blow is struck that Sisera sinks and falls to the ground (v. 27), implying that Sisera was not lying down – and indeed was not asleep – when Jael makes her move.

How, then, might we imagine the scene just prior to Sisera's death? Although the poem is certainly not explicit on this matter, v. 27 might provide a clue. It describes Sisera's death using several words – "kneel" (כָּרַע), "lay" (שָׁכַב), and "feet" (רַגְלָיו) – that can each carry sexually connotative double meanings. In fact, Susan Niditch persuasively argues that the language in Judges 5:27 simultaneously evokes death and eroticism.¹³ For instance, שָׁכַב is often used in sexual contexts to refer to rape, as is the case with Dinah (Gen 34:2, 7) and Tamar (2 Sam 13:11, 14).¹⁴ At the same time, שָׁכַב can also be associated with death, as in the common idiom for dying "he slept with his ancestors" (used 26x in 1-2 Kgs). Likewise, כָּרַע is used in Job 31:10 to imply kneeling over a woman in a sexual posture while in Ps 20:9 the same verb, coupled with נָפַל as in Judges 5, indicates death and defeat.¹⁵ Various other scholars also contend that the double meanings implied by these terms creates the possibility that some form of sexual violence is implied.¹⁶

While I find this reading of Judges 5:27 compelling, the conclusions that Niditch draws seem less persuasive. She contends that Judges 5:27 depicts a type of reversed rape where Jael acts the part of a *femme fatale*. In other words, Jael is an assertive hero who intentionally turns the tables of sexual violence on her male victim. Such a view is plausible, though it is not the

¹³ Susan Niditch, "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. P. L. Day; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989), 51.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁶ Cf. Fewell and Gunn, "Controlling Perspectives," 393-94; Sakenfeld, "Cross Cultural Context," 20 and Ann Wansbrough, "Blessed be Jael Among Women: For She Challenged Rape," in *Women of Courage: Asian Women Reading the Bible* (ed. Lee Oo Chung et al.; Seoul, Korea: Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, 1992), 101-22.

only interpretive option.¹⁷ In fact, this conclusion seems to depend on certain details – such as a premeditated plot to lure Sisera into the tent – that are only found in Judges 4. If one resists the tendency to harmonize Judges 4-5, then another option emerges. Jael's actions in Judges 5 might just as well constitute a form of resistance and self-defense, or as Sakenfeld says, a way of "say[ing] 'no' to rape in the context of war."¹⁸ Indeed, it is hardly difficult to imagine the possibility of sexual conquest looming in the background of ancient (or modern) accounts of war. This possibility might even be implied in the lament of Sisera's mother in Judges 5:28-30. She imagines her son, along with the rest of the Canaanite army, returning victoriously with "a girl or two for every man" (v. 30) as their rightful spoils of war. Of course, Sisera does not return as his mother hopes, and so perhaps Niditch is right to imply that Sisera himself had become the victim of Jael's conquest. But in my view, Sisera's lack of success on the battlefield would not make him any less inclined toward sexual conquest. In fact, Sisera might have seen Jael as a type of consolation prize: what he could not win on the battlefield he attempted to claim in Jael's tent. If this interpretation is correct and Sisera is the subject, not the object, of sexual violence, then what Jael does in Judges 5 might be understood as resistance to rape not reversed rape. Such a reading might lend added significance to what it means for Jael to be heralded as "most blessed *among women*" in Judges 5:24.

¹⁷ Sakenfeld, following Niditch ("Eroticism and Death") and Ann Wansbrough ("Blessed be Jael Among Women: For She Challenged Rape," in *Women of Courage: Asian Women Reading the Bible* [ed. Lee Oo Chung et al.; Seoul, Korea: Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, 1992], 101-22), rightly claims that it is reasonable to read the *poem* with this double-meaning of sexual violence (cf. "Cross Cultural Context," 20).

¹⁸ Sakenfeld, "Cross Cultural Context," 20.

4. MIMETICISM AND THE MODEL MINORITY DILEMMA – THE COST OF Jael's HEROISM

As Sakenfeld has suggested, numerous contemporary readers might find various points of contact with Jael. Indeed, the very presence of a non-Israelite heroine in a story about Israel's conquest might offer readers a resource for resisting a long history of interpretive conclusions that essentialize non-Israelites as the adversarial other.¹⁹ Alternatively, Jael might stand as a model of courage and agency among contemporary readers who face oppression, be it sexual or otherwise.²⁰ While such readings are not to be denied, questions remain. In what ways – and at what cost – does Jael become a heroine in these stories? How can the different profiles of Jael in Judges 4 and 5 be understood from a postcolonial perspective? In this final section, I will briefly evaluate these questions by turning to theories developed within postcolonial studies about mimeticism and the "model minority" paradigm.

One of the ways postcolonial theory frames the interaction of dominant (colonizer) and marginal (colonized) groups is through the concept of mimeticism. In an article on Asian American biblical hermeneutics, Gale Yee draws upon the work of cultural theorist Rey Chow to highlight the various levels of mimetic influence among marginal groups, be it colonized third-world nations or immigrants and refugees in first-world countries such as America.²¹ At one level, the marginal group might be legally forced to imitate the language, values, and customs of the dominant group. Such coercion is a part of everyday life for many immigrants in America

¹⁹ There are many examples of how negative portrayals of non-Israelites have the potential to reach far beyond the pages of the biblical text. For instance, 17th century Puritan preachers commonly characterized Native Americans as Canaanites as a way of justifying the mass killings and deportations that figured so prominently in the European conquest of the Americas. In a similar way, it is common in the English language even to this day to use the term "philistine" to describe someone who is culturally, intellectually, and aesthetically unrefined.

²⁰ Sakenfeld, "Cross-Cultural Context," 17.

²¹ Yee, "Yin/Yang Is Not Me," 153-54. See also Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic & the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

today. Yet marginal populations face mimetic pressure at a second level. Many cultures construct a system of rewards and affirmations that are selectively granted to those outsiders who live in accordance with the values and norms of the dominant group. Those who choose to assimilate into and align with the dominant culture are often referred to as a "model minority."

The term model minority took hold in the 1960s, most notably through the work of Berkeley sociologist William Petersen. Petersen applied this term to Asian-Americans who achieved a high level of success relative to other minority immigrant populations in the United States.²² While at first glance this term might appear complimentary, law professor Frank H. Wu rightly exposes the model minority paradigm as yet another level of the marginalizing influence of colonial discourse.²³ In fact, the model minority paradigm is problematic on several levels. First, this paradigm tends to make the acceptance of minority groups contingent on assimilation. Thus, a minority group is deemed to be a "model" only insofar as they become like the majority population, a process of imitation that often demands the severing of ties with alternative cultural and political identities. Second, the model minority paradigm proves to be problematic insofar as the existence of a model minority often implies the existence of a "problem minority" to whom the dominant group can say: The model minority made it – why can't *you*?²⁴ Such thinking reveals a blame-shifting mechanism that tends to interpret the plight of marginal groups strictly in terms of individual failures. Thus, while the presence of successful minority groups are often seen as evidence of the inclusivity of the dominant culture, this paradigm often conceals the effects of systemic patterns of oppression.

²² See for instance, William Petersen, "Success Story, Japanese American Style," *New York Times*, January 9 (1966); and idem, *Japanese Americans: Oppression and Success* (New York: Random House, 1971).

²³ Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 37-77.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

How might this assessment inform our understanding of the different portrayals of Jael's heroism in Judges 4 and 5? I want to suggest that the Jael of Judges 4 might be understood as a type of model minority. In other words, Jael is a heroine for Israel because she plays the role of the faithful outsider, a trope common in biblical literature in which non-Israelites serve the interests of their Israelite allies. This much seems to be true of Judges 4, where Jael's actions are framed as a choice for Israel and against Canaan. Yet what is especially striking is that the nature of Jael's actions, not just the results, hint at mimicry. In fact, the Jael of Judges 4 seems to be made in the image of the Israelite deliverer Ehud in Judges 3. Ehud intentionally approaches the enemy Eglon (vv. 16-17), uses deception and secrecy to set a trap (vv. 19-21a), thrusts (עָרָה) a sword all the way through the enemy's body (vv. 21b-22), and announces his triumph (v. 28), all of which results in the enemy forces being subdued (עָנָה, v. 30). Similarly, Judges 4 describes how Jael intentionally approaches the enemy Sisera (v. 18a), uses deception and secrecy to set a trap (vv. 18b-20), thrusts (עָרָה) a tent peg all the way through the enemy's body (v. 21), and announces her triumph (v. 22), all of which results in the enemy forces being subdued (עָנָה, v. 23). This close parallel suggests that in Judges 4, Jael is portrayed as heroine for Israel by virtue of her behaving like an Israelite hero.

In contrast, I believe that Judges 5 resists this hero-as-model-minority paradigm. By leaving details about the Kenites off stage and giving a different sense of the murder itself, Judges 5 neither situates Jael's actions as a choice for the Israelites nor describes them in terms characteristic of Israelite heroes. In this sense, what makes Jael "most blessed" in Judges 5 seems less explicitly tethered to the cause of the Israelites. In fact, in my reading of Judges 5, the "choice" Jael makes to kill Sisera is one that prioritizes her own self-protection. At the very

least, the ambiguity surrounding the murder in Judges 5 makes it possible to understand Jael's actions as a triumph "among women" – both ancient and modern – who likewise face the specter of sexual violence.

5. CONCLUSION

I have attempted to show through the course of this paper that the Jael of Judges 5 is not the Jael of Judges 4, and neither are the implications the same for contemporary readers. Postcolonial theories about mimeticism and model minorities not only offer one way of assessing the differences between Judges 4 and 5, but they also indicate that what needs to be examined in postcolonial biblical criticism is not only the *negative* portrayals of non-Israelite "others," but also the *positive* portrayals that require these "others" to assimilate into or align with the dominant culture. In this regard, while neither Judges 4 or 5 is purely promising or unavoidably problematic for contemporary subjects, Judges 5 seems to do more to resist presenting Jael as a sort of model minority. Thus, in my estimation, the sort of connection Sakenfeld sought to cultivate between contemporary readers and the figure of Jael is most promising when viewed in light of the portrayal offered in Judges 5.