

This is a close-reading as well as an ethical and theological investigation of five biblical passages in which women are witnesses, victims or perpetrators of violence. The purpose is to approach these figures, to reveal the narratives that surround and sometimes conceal them and investigate their ethical, hermeneutical and counseling potential for the contemporary reader.

The study was conducted in dialogue with biblical scholars, feminist theologians and ethics, along with Swedish literature and poetry. Power, sex, violence, speech, silence, resistance and action are the main philosophical categories that this inquiry into marginalized, painful and violent biblical passages focus on.

I attempt to uncover ‘the ethical and theological subjectivity’ of these figures beneath their namelessness, motives and actions. I borrow a close-reading method from Mieke Bal who was inspired by a structuralist approach to literature and through the specific (theological and ethical) questions that arise. Each of the five figures are viewed in relation to the kind of issues that are raised and identified in the individual readings.

By choosing a slave consigned in her master’s bed, a nameless concubine who has been raped, a grieving mother, a women awaiting the return of her dead son and a widow who commits a political murder – I seek to refine and enrich our understanding of biblical figures as well as their contribution to political feminist and non-violent struggle.

An implicit aim of this study is to supplement a power-critical and feminist reading of violent biblical passages with an approach that promotes counseling, responsibility and hope. The question of God’s presence, absence or ignorance vis-à-vis these figures as well as the uncertain relationship between speech, resistance and silence are at the core of my investigation. The study examines philosophical assumptions, assesses hermeneutical tools, makes ethical observations and reflects on the epistemological issues that emerge from the readings.

The position of readers is continuously reviewed with respect to their potential transformation and willingness to be affected (transformed) by deeply painful, violent and ultimately human stories.

The passages come from Genesis 16 & 21, Book of Judges 5, Book of Judges 19, 2 Book of Solomon 21 and Book of Judith. The five figures are Hagar, the unnamed, raped and scattered concubine from Bethlehem, Rizpah, Sisera’s mother and Judith.